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# RED SAXONY

*Election Battles and the Spectre of  
Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918*



JAMES RETALLACK

## RED SAXONY



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For Helen

A thousand ships,  
not a thousand pages



# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Maps</i>	xi
<i>List of Tables</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvii
<i>Note on Sources</i>	xxiii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
Election Battles and Democratization	3
Socialists and Others	8
Saxony and the Reich	12
<b>1. On the Threshold of a New Age</b>	20
Saxony's Modernization	20
Electoral Politics in the Old Key	30
"New Ideas are Filling the World"	39
<b>2. The Possibilities of Liberal Reform</b>	47
The Reichstag Elections of February 1867	47
Saxony and the North German Confederation	59
The Landtag Suffrage Reform of 1868	66
A "Liberal Era"?	81
<b>3. Enemies of the Reich</b>	92
The Rise of Saxon Social Democracy	92
Red Saxony? The Shock of January 1874	105
The Struggle Against Subversion	120
<b>4. The Struggle Against Revolution</b>	131
The National Context	131
Saxony's Contribution	135
In the Trenches	156
"Valid"—"Not Valid"	171
<b>5. Against Liberalism and the Jews</b>	186
Liberalism Adrift	187
Conservatives and Radical Antisemites	198
<b>6. Authoritarianism Under Siege</b>	230
"1,427,298 Social Democratic Voters!"	230
Rowdy Business	244
Politics in an Off Key	259

<b>7. Suffrage Reform as Coup d'État</b>	270
"For Religion, Morality, and Order"	270
Throwing Down the Gauntlet	282
High Tide	305
<b>8. "Red Saxony!"</b>	318
High Stakes, 1903	318
A Way Forward?	342
<b>9. Deflecting Democracy</b>	359
"The Decent Opinion of Mankind"	360
Saxon Models	372
<b>10. Crisis and Retrenchment</b>	393
Power of the Street	394
Holding the Line, January 1907	411
<b>11. Dance</b>	435
A House Divided	436
Democracy in Disappearing Ink	460
<b>12. Politics in a New Key</b>	482
<i>Praxis</i> , October 1909	482
Perplexed	505
Casting Ballots, Casting Stones	519
<b>13. Adrift</b>	537
A Lost Half-Decade	538
Stirrings	551
Licking Wounds	576
Suffrage Reform: Right, Half Turn!	583
<b>14. Democracy Deferred</b>	593
The Crucible of War	593
The Curious Republic of Gondour	614
Conclusion: The Spectre of Democracy	616
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	631
<i>List of Archives and Libraries</i>	635
<i>Works Cited</i>	639
<i>Index</i>	681

# *List of Figures*

## COLOR PLATES

1. "Election Outcome" (*Simplicissimus*, 1903).
2. Map, Population Density in Saxony, 1910.
3. Map, Reichstag Voting in Leipzig-County, 1887.
4. Map, Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (rural).
5. Map, Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (urban).
6. "The Conservatives' Last Resort" (*Simplicissimus*, 1910).
7. "In Memory of the Reichstag Election of 1903."
8. "About the Suffrage Riots" (*Simplicissimus*, 1908).
9. "After the Street Demonstration" (*Simplicissimus*, 1910).
10. "Reading of the Election Result" (*Simplicissimus*, 1912).
11. "Red Saxonia" (*Simplicissimus*, 1909).
12. Map, Gustav Freytag's *Reichstag Election Map of the German Reich*, 1903.
13. Map, Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1909.
14. Map, Landtag Election Results in Saxony (rural), 1909.
15. Map, Landtag Election Results in Saxony (urban), 1909.
16. "The Evolution of the National Liberal" (*Simplicissimus*, 1903).

## GREYSCALE

1.1. King Johann of Saxony (ruled 1854–73).	24
1.2. Prussian Troops Enter Dresden, 18 June 1866.	27
1.3. Saxon Minister Richard von Friesen.	28
3.1. Saxon Members of the German Conservative Party, c. 1877.	119
4.1. List of Social Democrats Expelled from Leipzig under §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law.	144
4.2. Saxon Minister of Culture Carl von Gerber, Saxon Minister of War Alfred von Fabrice.	184
5.1. Saxon Landtag Deputies, Occupation and Party Affiliation, 1869–1918.	194
5.2. Occupational Profile of Populations in Saxony and the Reich, 1895.	195
5.3. Emil Lehmann, Dresden Lawyer and Assemblyman.	200
5.4. Baron Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha.	206



5.5. <i>Antisemitic Catechism</i> and Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg.	215
5.6. Dr. jur. Paul Mehnert (1852–1922).	222
6.1. <i>Politischer Bilderbogen</i> No. 12, “German Dance of Death!”	246
6.2. Disturbers are Thrown Out of a Berlin Election Meeting.	257
6.3. Two Antisemites: Hermann Ahlwardt and Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha.	263
8.1. Count Georg von Metzsch and Crown Princess Luise of Tuscany.	322
8.2. The Twenty-Two Social Democratic Reichstag Deputies from Saxony, 1903.	336
9.1. A Conservative’s Idyllic Reichstag—Empty.	374
9.2. Regional Governors Otto von Ehrenstein (Leipzig) and Anselm Rumpelt (Dresden).	382
10.1. “The Agrarian” ( <i>Simplicissimus</i> , 1903–04).	414
10.2. “To Honor the Fatherland, Vote Against its Destroyers!” (flyer, 1907).	425
11.1. Suffrage Demonstrators on Leipzig’s <i>Dittrichring</i> , 1 November 1908.	458
11.2. Suffrage Demonstration on Leipzig’s <i>Messplatz</i> , 1 November 1908.	458
11.3. Suffrage Demonstrators in Leipzig, 1 November 1908.	459
12.1. SPD Membership Growth, Saxony and the Reich, 1905–14.	488
12.2. Landtag Voters and Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type and Party, Saxony 1909.	524
12.3. Working-class Voters and SPD Voters in Twenty Large City Constituencies, Saxony 1909.	529
12.4. Working-class Voters and SPD Voters in Twenty-Three Other Urban Constituencies, Saxony 1909.	530
13.1. Lower Chamber of the Saxon Landtag, 1905.	540
13.2. Election Night in Leipzig, January 1912.	559
13.3. “A Diplomat” ( <i>Simplicissimus</i> , 1903).	563
14.1. Dedication of the Monument to the Battle of Nations, Leipzig, 1913.	609

# *List of Maps*

## COLOR PLATES

2. Population Density in Saxony, 1910. This map was based on the census of 1 December 1910. At that time, Saxony's population stood at 4,802,485 and its territory covered 14,993 square kilometers, yielding a density of 320 persons per square kilometer. As the last line notes, this map depicts the approximate distribution of industrial districts in Saxony. For translation of the text, see this book's Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.  
*Source:* Bruno Krause, ed., *Sächsischer Vaterlands-Atlas*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dresden, n.d. [c. 1912]).
3. Reichstag Voting in Leipzig-County, 1887. This map was drawn as part of a protested Reichstag election. The National Liberal candidate was Ferdinand Goetz, a popular physician in Leipzig. His rival was a Social Democratic newspaper editor, Louis Viereck. Social Democratic support (in red) over-spilled the city limits of Leipzig—which constituted a separate constituency—but yielded to National Liberal strength in the countryside (shown in blue and green). The red circle shows a distance of five kilometers from Leipzig's old market square. *Legend* (at left): Election Map of the Constituency of Leipzig-County, 1887. Dr. Goetz, 20,039 votes. Viereck, 19,327 votes. At right (top to bottom): Explanation of Colors. Dr. Goetz, unanimous. Ditto, almost unanimous. Ditto, large majority. Ditto, small majority. Viereck, small majority. Ditto, large majority.  
*Source:* Das Wahl-Comité der vereinigten Ordnungs-Parteien für Leipzig-Land, *Wahl des Herrn Dr. med. Ferdinand Goetz für den 13. sächsischen Wahlkreis (Leipzig-Land) betr.* (Leipzig, n.d. [May 1887]), back matter.
4. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (rural). This overview shows the distribution of forty-five rural constituencies in Saxony. All constituencies were contested in 1869. Thereafter, in any given constituency, elections were held every six years, according to a rhythm shown in the legend.  
*Source:* *Atlas zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Sachsen, Karte D IV 3* (Dresden, 2002) (adapted by the author).
5. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (urban). This overview shows the distribution of urban constituencies in Saxony. Eleven “large city” constituencies were awarded to Dresden (5), Leipzig (3), Chemnitz (2), and Zwickau (1). Twenty-four “other urban” constituencies connected voters in smaller cities and towns. All constituencies were contested in 1869. Thereafter, in any given constituency, elections were held every six years, according to a rhythm shown in the legend.  
*Source:* *Atlas zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Sachsen, Karte D IV 3* (Dresden, 2002) (adapted by the author).
12. Gustav Freytag's *Reichstag Election Map of the German Reich*, 1903. The bloc of twenty-two Social Democratic seats in “red Saxony” can be seen in central Germany. See also the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.  
*Source:* *Reichstags-Wahlkarte des Deutschen Reiches. Nach den Ergebnissen der Wahlen vom 16. Juni*

1903 mit Berücksichtigung der Stich- und Nachwahlen. Entworfen von Gustav Freitag. 1903 (Vienna, 1903).

13. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1909. This map shows the forty-eight rural and forty-three urban constituencies in Saxony after the Landtag suffrage reform of 1909. *Source:* Bruno Krause, ed., *Sächsischer Vaterlands-Atlas*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dresden, n.d. [c. 1912]).
14. Landtag Election Results in Saxony (rural), 1909. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. Drawn by Cherie Northon, Mapping Solutions, Alaska.
15. Landtag Election Results in Saxony (urban), 1909. Colors show the winning party in Saxony's twenty-three "other urban" constituencies. For maps showing election results in Dresden I–VII, Leipzig I–VII, and Chemnitz I–IV, see the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. Drawn by Cherie Northon, Mapping Solutions, Alaska.

## GRAYSCALE

I.1. The German Empire, 1871–1918.	18
2.1. Reichstag Constituencies in the Kingdom of Saxony (overview).	49
2.2. Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 12 February 1867.	58
2.3. Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 31 August 1867.	65
4.1. Distribution of <i>Der Sozialdemokrat</i> in Germany, 1888.	163
12.1. Saxon Landtag Constituencies (rural), 1909.	508
12.2. Saxon Landtag Constituencies (urban), 1909.	509

## ONLINE SUPPLEMENT

The following maps are available on the University of Toronto website dedicated to this book: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

### Introduction

The German Empire, 1871–1918

#### 1. On the Threshold of a New Age

Geographic Regions of Saxony, 1910

Administrative Regions of Saxony, 1910

Population Density in Saxony, 1910

Principal Industries in Saxony, 1910

*Schulkarte von Sachsen*, 1889

*Deutsches Reich. Verteilung der Bevölkerung in Stadt und Land*, 1900

## 2. The Possibilities of Liberal Reform

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, February 1867  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, August 1867  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony (legend), 1871–1918  
 Reichstag Constituencies in Saxony (overview 1), 1871–1918  
 Reichstag Constituencies in Saxony (overview 2), 1871–1918  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony (legend), 1869–1895/96  
 Landtag Constituencies in Saxony (rural), 1868–1909  
 Landtag Constituencies in Saxony (urban), 1868–1909  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1869

## 3. Enemies of the Reich

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1871  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1871  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1874  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1874  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1877  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1877  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1871, 1873, 1875  
*Karte der Wahlen zum Deutschen Reichstag am 10. Januar 1877*

## 4. The Struggle Against Revolution

Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1877, 1879, 1881  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1883, 1885, 1887  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1878  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1878  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1881  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1881  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1884  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1884  
*Reichstagswahlen von 1884*

## 5. Against Liberalism and the Jews

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1887  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1887

## 6. Authoritarianism Under Siege

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1890  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1890  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1893  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1893  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1889, 1891, 1893  
*Reichstagswahlen von 1890*  
*Die Reichstagswahlen von 1893*

## 7. Suffrage Reform as Coup d'État

Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1895  
 Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1898

Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1898  
*Die Reichstagswahlen von 1898*

8. “Red Saxony!”

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1903  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1903  
 Gustav Freytag’s *Reichstags-Wahlkarte des Deutschen Reiches*, 1903

10. Crisis and Retrenchment

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1907  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1907  
*Deutsches Reich. Reichstagswahlen vom 25. Januar 1907*

11. Dance

Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1909  
*Grasers Karte von Sachsen mit Angabe der Landtags- und Reichstagswahlkreise*, c. 1911

12. Politics in a New Key

Saxon Landtag Constituencies (rural), 1909  
 Saxon Landtag Constituencies (urban), 1909  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony (rural), 1909  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony (urban), 1909  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1909: Dresden I–VII  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1909: Leipzig I–VII  
 Landtag Elections in Saxony, 1909: Chemnitz I–IV

13. Adrift

Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 1912  
 Party Bastions in Saxon Reichstag Elections, 1912  
*Die Vertretung der Wahlkreise bei Schluß des Reichstags 1911*

## *List of Tables*

2.1. Party Caucuses in the Constituent North German Reichstag, April 1867	57
2.2. Party Caucuses in the North German Reichstag, February and August 1867	64
2.3. Saxon Landtag Elections, 4 June 1869	84
3.1. Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, Membership in Saxony and the Reich, 1875	94
3.2. Saxon Landtag Elections, 1871, 1873, 1875	108
3.3. Socialist Votes in Reichstag Elections, Saxony and the Reich, 1871 and 1874	112
3.4. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1871 and 1874	113
3.5. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1874 and 1877	126
4.1. Social Democracy in Reichstag Elections: Saxony and the Reich, 1878–90	136
4.2. Saxon Landtag Elections, 1877, 1879, 1881	146
4.3. Saxon Landtag Elections, 1883, 1885, 1887	147
4.4. Saxon Landtag Party Caucuses, 1869–87	148
4.5. Social Democratic Deputies in the Saxon Landtag, 1877–87	149
4.6. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1878 and 1881	154
4.7. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1884 and 1887	155
5.1. Jewish Populations in Saxony and Germany, 1849–90	202
5.2. German Population Increase, by Confession and State, 1871–85	202
6.1. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1887 and 1890	235
6.2. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1890 and 1893	265
7.1. Leipzig Municipal Elections, 1889–93	287
7.2. Party Caucuses in the Saxon Landtag, 1889–1907	306
7.3. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1893 and 1898	313
8.1. Saxon SPD Membership, by Constituency Organization, 1901–04	324
8.2. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1898 and 1903	330
8.3. Reichstag Elections by Size of Community, Saxony and the Reich, 1898 and 1903	331
8.4. Social Democratic Party Strength in Saxony, by Constituency, 1903	332
10.1. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1903 and 1907	428
11.1. Enfranchised Electors in Saxony: Landtag and Reichstag Elections, 1869–1912	464
11.2. Enfranchised Population by Constituency Type: Saxon Landtag, 1909	465
11.3. Expected Support for Social Democracy, by Occupation, Property, Income, Age, 1908	470
12.1. Saxon SPD Membership, by Reichstag Constituency, 1901–14	489

12.2. The SPD Press in Saxony and the Reich, Circulation, 1890s–1914	490
12.3. Male and Female Membership in the SPD, Saxony and the Reich, 1908–14	492
12.4. Party Rivalries, Saxon Landtag Elections, 1909	511
12.5. Plural Voting, by Party and Number of Ballots, 1: Zittau, 1909	513
12.6. Annual Earnings of Heads of Family in Germany, by Occupational Category, 1907–08	517
12.7. Annual Earnings of Heads of Family in Germany, by Occupation, 1907–08	518
12.8. Working-Class Voters, SPD Voters, and SPD Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type, 1909	520
12.9. Ballots Cast for SPD and Non-SPD Candidates, Saxony 1909: Estimated and Actual	522
12.10. Landtag Voters and Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type and Party, Saxony 1909	526
13.1. Reichstag Election in 23: Plauen, January 1912	570
13.2. Reichstag Elections, Seats Won on Main and Run-off Ballots, 1907 and 1912	572
13.3. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1907 and 1912	574
13.4. Reichstag Elections in Saxony, by Constituency and Party, 1912	575
14.1. Members of the Constitutional Committee, Saxon Landtag, 1917–18	604

# *List of Abbreviations*

## 1. DOCUMENTARY AND REFERENCE SOURCES

AB-PrStMin	<i>Acta Borussica. Die Protokolle des Preussischen Staatsministeriums 1817–1934/38, Neue Folge</i> ( <a href="http://preussenprotokolle.bbaw.de/editionsbaende-im-Internet">http://preussenprotokolle.bbaw.de/editionsbaende-im-Internet</a> )
ADB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i> (print and online) (See DB <a href="http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/">http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/</a> )
ASE	<i>Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution</i> , ed. Richard S. Levy, 2 vols.
BAmL	August Bebel, <i>Aus meinem Leben</i> , 3rd ed. (Berlin-GDR, 1961)
BARuS	August Bebel, <i>Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften</i>
BETG	<i>British Envoys to Germany, 1816–1866</i> , ed. Sabine Freitag et al., 4 vols.
BFO-CP	<i>British Foreign Office, Confidential Print, Germany, Series 1, 1906–1919</i>
BGuE	Otto von Bismarck, <i>Gedanken und Erinnerungen</i>
BWiA	Otto von Bismarck, <i>Werke im Auswahl</i>
DB	<i>Deutsche Biographie</i> ( <a href="http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/">http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/</a> )
GHDI	<i>German History in Documents and Images</i>
GVBl	<i>Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für das Königreich Sachsen</i> (print and online): ( <a href="http://landtagsprotokolle.sachsendigital.de/protokolle/zeitraum-1831–1918/">http://landtagsprotokolle.sachsendigital.de/protokolle/zeitraum-1831–1918/</a> )
Lexikon	<i>Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte 1789–1945</i> , ed. Dieter Fricke et al., 4 vols.
LRTW	Simone Lässig, <i>Reichstagswahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1871–1912</i>
LTakten	<i>Landtagsakten. Verhandlungen des ordentlichen/außerordentlichen Landtags des Königreichs Sachsen</i>
LT Mitt	<i>Mitteilungen aus der Verhandlungen des . . . Landtags des Königreichs Sachsen</i>
LWRK	Simone Lässig, <i>Wahlrechtskampf und Wahlreform in Sachsen (1895–1909)</i>
MEW	Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Werke</i>
NDB	<i>Neue Deutsche Biographie</i> (print and online) (See DB: <a href="http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/">http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/</a> )
NL	Unpublished private papers ( <i>Nachlaß</i> )
PAS	Matthias Piefel, <i>Antisemitismus und völkische Bewegung im Königreich Sachsen 1879–1914</i>
RHRT	Carl-Wilhelm Reibel, ed., <i>Handbuch der Reichstagswahlen 1890–1918. Bündnisse—Ergebnisse—Kandidaten</i> , 2 vols.
RWA	Gerhard A. Ritter with Merith Niehuss, <i>Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918</i>
SBDR	<i>Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags</i>
SBDRAnl	<i>Anlagen zu den Verhandlungen des (Deutschen) Reichstages</i> , legislative period / session (e.g. 5/II)
SLTW	Wolfgang Schröder, <i>Landtagswahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1869 bis 1895/6</i>
SParl	<i>Sächsische Parlamentarier 1869–1918</i> , ed. Elvira Döschner and Wolfgang Schröder



<i>StatJbDR</i>	<i>Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich</i>
<i>StatJbS</i>	<i>Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen</i>
ZSSB	<i>Zeitschrift des Königlichen Sächsischen Statistischen Bureaus</i>
ZSSL	<i>Zeitschrift des Königlichen Sächsischen Statistischen Landesamtes</i>
ZSSL 1909	<i>Die Wahlen für die Zweite Kammer der Ständeversammlung vom Oktober und November 1909. Sonderabdruck aus der "Zeitschrift des Königlichen Sächsischen Statistischen Landesamtes,"</i> ed. Eugen Würzburger

## 2. ASSOCIATIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES

ADAV	General German Workers' Association ( <i>Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein</i> )
AHM	district governor ( <i>Amtshauptmann</i> )
AHMS	district ( <i>Amtshauptmannschaft</i> )
AS	Antisemite, antisemitic
Cons	Conservative
CSP	Christian Social Party ( <i>Christlich-Soziale Partei</i> )
DKP	German Conservative Party ( <i>Deutschkonservative Partei</i> )
DRP	German Reform Party ( <i>Deutsche Reformpartei</i> )
DSP	German Social Party ( <i>Deutsch-Soziale Partei</i> )
DVP	German Fatherland Party ( <i>Deutsche Vaterlandspartei</i> )
FKP	Free Conservative Party (see RFKP)
FoVP	Progressive People's Party ( <i>Fortschrittliche Volkspartei</i> )
KHM	regional governor ( <i>Kreishauptmann</i> ) (before 1874: <i>Kreisdirektor</i> )
KHMS	region ( <i>Kreishauptmannschaft</i> ) (before 1874: <i>Kreisdirektion</i> )
LWSKVS	Agricultural Credit Association for the Kingdom of Saxony ( <i>Landwirtschaftlicher Kreditverein für das Königreich Sachsen</i> )
LL	Left liberal
MSPD	Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany ( <i>Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , 1917– )
NL	National Liberal
NLP	National Liberal Party ( <i>Nationalliberale Partei</i> )
NLVKS	National Liberal Association for the Kingdom of Saxony ( <i>National-liberaler Verein für das Königreich Sachsen</i> )
RDMV	Imperial German Mittelstand Union ( <i>Reichsdeutsche Mittelstands-Vereinigung</i> )
RFKP	Imperial and Free Conservative Party ( <i>Reichs- und Freikonservative Partei</i> )
SAPD	Socialist Workers' Party of Germany ( <i>Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i> , 1875–90)
SD / SPD	Social Democrat, Social Democratic
SDAP	Social Democratic Workers' Party ( <i>Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei</i> , 1869–75)
SMVgg	Saxon Mittelstand Union ( <i>Sächsische Mittelstandsvereinigung</i> )
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany ( <i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , 1890– )
SVP	Saxon People's Party ( <i>Sächsische Volkspartei</i> )
USPD	Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany ( <i>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , 1917– )

VDAV	Congress of German Workers' Associations ( <i>Vereinstag</i> [1868: <i>Verband</i> ] <i>Deutscher Arbeitervereine</i> )
VSI	Association of Saxon Industrialists ( <i>Verein Sächsischer Industrieller</i> )
WV	Economic Union ( <i>Wirtschaftliche Vereinigung</i> )
Z	German Center Party ( <i>Deutsche Zentrumspartei</i> ), Center Party member

### 3. OFFICES AND INSTITUTIONS

I.K.	<i>Erste Kammer</i> (House of Lords, upper chamber), Saxon Landtag
II.K.	<i>Zweite Kammer</i> (House of Deputies, lower chamber), Saxon Landtag
FO	Foreign Office
GM	State Ministry ( <i>Gesamtministerium</i> ), Saxony
LT	Landtag (state parliament)
MdAA	Minister / Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MdI	Minister / Ministry of the Interior
MdJ	Minister / Ministry of Justice
MdLT	Member of the Landtag
MdR	Member of the Reichstag
MdI.K.	Member of the Saxon Landtag (House of Lords, <i>Erste Kammer</i> )
MdII.K.	Member of the Saxon Landtag (House of Deputies, <i>Zweite Kammer</i> )
MdPAH	Member of the Prussian Landtag (House of Deputies, <i>Abgeordnetenhaus</i> )
MdPHH	Member of the Prussian Landtag (House of Lords, <i>Herrenhaus</i> )
O/BM	Lord Mayor / Mayor ( <i>Ober- / Bürgermeister</i> )
PAH	House of Deputies ( <i>Abgeordnetenhaus</i> , lower chamber), Prussian Landtag
PHH	House of Lords ( <i>Herrenhaus</i> , upper chamber), Prussian Landtag
Pr	Prussia, Prussian
PrStMin	Prussian State Ministry ( <i>Preußischer Staatsministerium</i> )
RAdI	Reich Office of the Interior ( <i>Reichsamt des Innern</i> )
RKA	Reich Chancellery Office ( <i>Reichskanzleramt</i> )
Rkz	Reich Chancellery ( <i>Reichskanzlei</i> )
(R)SS	(Reich) State Secretary ( <i>Staats-Sekretär</i> )
RT	Reichstag
WK(e)	Constituency / constituencies ( <i>Wahlkreis, Wahlkreise</i> )

### 4. NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

#### SAXONY

(See also Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>)

<i>ASCorr</i>	<i>Antisemitische Correspondenz</i> (AS)
<i>BN</i>	<i>Budissiner Nachrichten</i> (Cons)
<i>CVbl</i>	<i>Conservatives Vereinsblatt</i> (Cons)
<i>CZ</i>	<i>Constitutionelle Zeitung</i> (NL)
<i>DAZ</i>	<i>Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (NL)

<i>DJ</i>	<i>Dresdner Journal</i> (official)
<i>DN</i>	<i>Dresdner Nachrichten</i> (Cons)
<i>DR</i>	<i>Deutsche Reform</i> (AS)
<i>DWbl</i>	<i>Deutsches Wochenblatt</i> (SPD)
<i>DZ</i>	<i>Dresdner Zeitung</i> (LL, later VSI)
<i>Gb</i>	<i>Die Grenzboten</i> (NL)
<i>LNN</i>	<i>Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten</i> (NL)
<i>LTA</i>	<i>Leipziger Tages-Anzeiger</i> (NL)
<i>LTBl</i>	<i>Leipziger Tageblatt und Anzeiger</i> (NL)
<i>LVZ</i>	<i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i> (SPD)
<i>LZ</i>	<i>Leipziger Zeitung</i> (semi-official)
<i>MFVKS</i>	<i>Mitteilungen aus der Fortschrittlichen Volkspartei im Königreich Sachsen</i> (LL)
<i>NPC</i>	<i>Neue Politische Correspondenz</i> (Cons)
<i>NRZ</i>	<i>Neue Reichszeitung</i> (Cons-AS)
<i>SAZ</i>	<i>Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung</i> (SPD)
<i>SIM</i>	<i>Schmeitzner's Internationale Monatsschrift</i> (AS)
<i>SPN</i>	<i>Sächsische Politische Nachrichten</i> (Cons)
<i>SVfr</i>	<i>Sächsischer Volksfreund</i> (Cons)
<i>SWbl</i>	<i>Sächsisches Wochenblatt</i> (SPD)
<i>SZ</i>	<i>Sächsische Zeitung</i> (Cons)
<i>Vaterl</i>	<i>Das Vaterland</i> (Cons)

## REICH

<i>AZJ</i>	<i>Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums</i> (Jewish)
<i>BtBl</i>	<i>Berliner Tageblatt</i> (LL)
<i>CC</i>	<i>Conservative Correspondenz</i> (Cons)
<i>DSBl</i>	<i>Deutsch-Soziale Blätter</i> (AS)
<i>DTZ</i>	<i>Deutsche Tageszeitung</i> (BdL)
<i>DW</i>	<i>Deutsche Wacht</i> (AS)
<i>FZ</i>	<i>Frankfurter Zeitung</i> (LL)
<i>KZ</i>	<i>Neue Preussische Zeitung (Kreuz-Zeitung)</i> (Cons)
<i>KdBdL</i>	<i>Korrespondenz des Bundes der Landwirte</i> (BdL)
<i>NAZ</i>	<i>Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (gov't)
<i>NatZ</i>	<i>Nationalzeitung</i>
<i>NLVBl</i>	<i>Nationalliberales Vereinsblatt</i> (NL)
<i>NZ</i>	<i>Die Neue Zeit</i> (SPD)
<i>PrJbb</i>	<i>Preussische Jahrbücher</i> (moderate Cons)
<i>Rb</i>	<i>Der Reichsbote</i> (Cons)
<i>SD</i>	<i>Der Sozialdemokrat</i> (SPD)
<i>SM</i>	<i>Sozialistische Monatshefte</i> (SPD)
<i>VkZ</i>	<i>Volks-Zeitung</i> (LL)
<i>Vw</i>	<i>Vorwärts</i> (SPD)
<i>VossZ</i>	<i>Vossische Zeitung</i> (LL)

**5. ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES**

(For renamed archives and libraries, also for further abbreviations, see the list of Archives and Libraries at the end of this book and the list of Archival and Library Sources in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.)

BAK	Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Koblenz
BAP	Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Potsdam
BHStAM	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich
BLHAP	Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam
GLAK	Generallandesarchiv, Karlsruhe
GStAB	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin
GStAM	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Merseburg (FRG)
HHStAV	Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv), Vienna, Austria
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, USA
PAAAB	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew, Great Britain
SBB	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz
SHStAD	Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden
SKAD	Sächsisches Kriegsarchiv, Dresden
SLUB	Sächsische Landesbibliothek. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden
SStAL	Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Leipzig
StadtAD	Stadtarchiv Dresden
StadtAL	Stadtarchiv Leipzig
ZStAM	Zentrales Staatsarchiv II, Merseburg (GDR)
ZStAP	Zentrales Staatsarchiv I, Potsdam (GDR)



## *Note on Sources*

I use a number of standard conventions to make this book's scholarly apparatus as concise as possible.

All dates are listed in European format as dd.mm.yy. Thus 3.7.66 refers to 3 July 1866. I use SPD even before it became the official name of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1890 (see Chapter 2 and the List of Abbreviations).

The reports of foreign diplomats stationed in the capital cities of Germany's federal states were sent, variously, to the foreign minister, the foreign office, or even the monarch of the state that employed the envoy (a generic term used for *chargés d'affaires*, ministers resident, and *Gesandten*; ambassadors and consuls are designated separately). The abbreviation FO is used for the foreign office of all states. A typical report *could* have been cited in long form as follows: Charles A. Murray, British *chargés d'affaires*, Dresden, report no. 40, to the Earl of Clarendon, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 2 July 1866, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, FO 68, Nr. 142, f. 137–9v. Instead I have assumed the reader will know that all diplomatic reports found in the PRO—now The National Archives—were sent to the British FO; all found in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Vienna were sent to the Austrian FO; all found in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts Bonn (now Berlin) were sent to the Prussian FO; all found in the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich were sent to the Bavarian FO; and so on. The cited report by Charles A. Murray would appear in this book's notes simply as Murray, 2.7.66, PRO, FO 68/142. Such reports are almost always filed chronologically, so for these reports—and for other archival citations—I have omitted folio numbers, using fuller citations as needed. I would be happy to provide interested readers with more precise details.

For reports from British envoys to Germany I have modernized spelling, grammar, punctuation, and occasionally even word choice to make the text more readable and comprehensible (for example, “Mayence” has been replaced by Mainz for the German city of that name).

The complete stenographic reports of debates in the German Reichstag (*SBDR*) and both chambers of the Saxon Landtag (*LTMitt*, I.K., II.K.) are now available online. I have therefore dispensed with unnecessary information about legislative periods, sessions, etc., where the date, volume, and page number suffice. The Saxon Landtag Supplements (*Anlagen*) are not online, so my references to those are fuller. I use GHDI to refer to primary sources available in both German and English in the digital history anthology *German History in Documents and Images*; volumes 4 and 5 cover the periods 1866–90 and 1890–1918, respectively.

I forgo providing biographical information about my subjects except where necessary. Internet resources for biographical research are vast. The older ADB and NDB are now available online as the *Deutsche Biographie*. For Conservative, Liberal, and Social Democratic members of the Reichstag, older handbooks and reference works are largely superseded by two volumes by Bernd Haunfelder (also one for the Prussian Landtag) and the volume on SPD deputies by Wilhelm Schröder. For Saxony, see the online *Sächsische Biographie*. An indispensable biographical resource on Saxon civil servants and state ministers is Thomas Klein, ed., *Sachsen*. On Saxon Landtag deputies (and much more), the key work is Elvira Döscher and Wolfgang Schröder, *Sächsische Parlamentarier 1869–1918 (SParl)*. Besides the

latter, many primary sources and most secondary sources on Reichstag and Landtag elections in Saxony are listed in the bibliographies to Simone Lässig, *Reichstagswahlen* (LRTW), and Wolfgang Schröder, *Landtagswahlen* (SLTW).

Selected figures, maps, tables, and illustrations that require large format or reproduction in color are found on a website for Online Supplements: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. See the List of Figures, List of Maps, and List of Tables, and consult the Online Supplement, to determine what appears in the printed book and what appears only online. The printed list of Works Cited includes sources actually cited in the footnotes of this book. The Online Supplement: Bibliography offers a more comprehensive list of printed sources relevant to the topic. I have cited titles alphabetically according to the first substantive noun in the title.

The printed list of Archives and Libraries cites only the principal source collections that underpin this book. The Online Supplement: Archival and Library Sources offers more detail about sub-collections, files names, dates, and call numbers. I have cited archives and libraries according to their name at the time I used them. The same is true for collection names and call numbers.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I was assisted by Dr. Erwin Fink, of TransMEDIA in Freiberg i.Br., who deserves sincere thanks. If I have failed to reach any copyright holders for the illustrations and maps in this book or among its Online Supplements, I encourage them to contact me by email at [james.retallack@utoronto.ca](mailto:james.retallack@utoronto.ca). For updates, see my academic homepage at <http://retallack.faculty.history.utoronto.ca>.

### Weblinks Cited

<http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/index.html>

<http://landtagsprotokolle.sachsendigital.de/protokolle/zeitraum-1831-1918/>

<http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/home.cfm>

<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/>

<http://saebi.isgv.de/>

<http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>

<http://retallack.faculty.history.utoronto.ca>

## Wahlergebnis

Zeichnung von C. Th. Heine



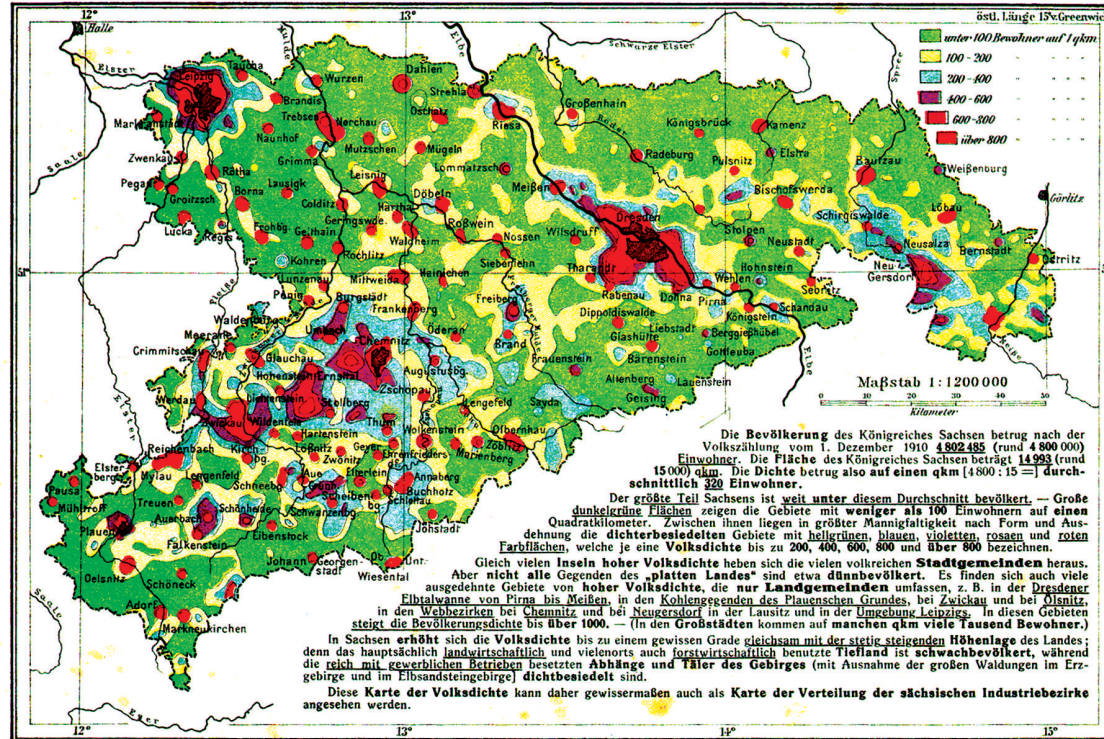
„Du bringst schon wieder das rote Ungeheuer aus der Wahlurne; das wird erst besser werden, wenn ich die Abgeordneten selbst ernenne.“

Plate 1. “Election Outcome.” The caption reads: “[King:] There’s the red monster again, crawling out of the voting urn; things will only improve when I name the parliamentary deputies myself.”

Source: Thomas Theodor Heine, “Wahlergebnis,” *Simplicissimus* 8 (1903–04), Nr. 53, Extra-Nummer, Reichstagswahl, 1. Simplicissimus Online: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.



# **Die Volksdichte im Königreiche Sachsen.** (Nach Angaben des Königlich Sächsischen Statistischen Landesamtes.)



(Ein Beispiel für die Ausbreitung der Einwohner eines Landes.)  
(Zugleich eine Darstellung der Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Volksdichte und Volkswirtschaft.)

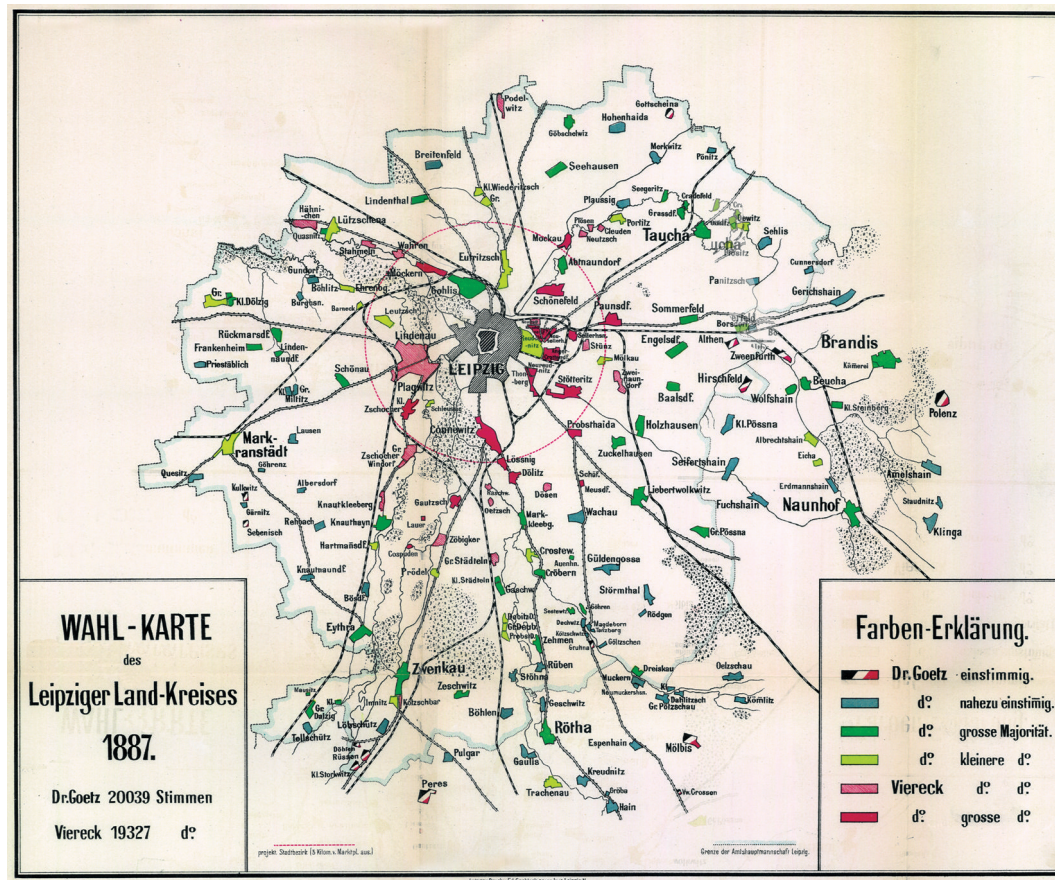


Plate 3. Reichstag Voting in Leipzig-County, 1887.

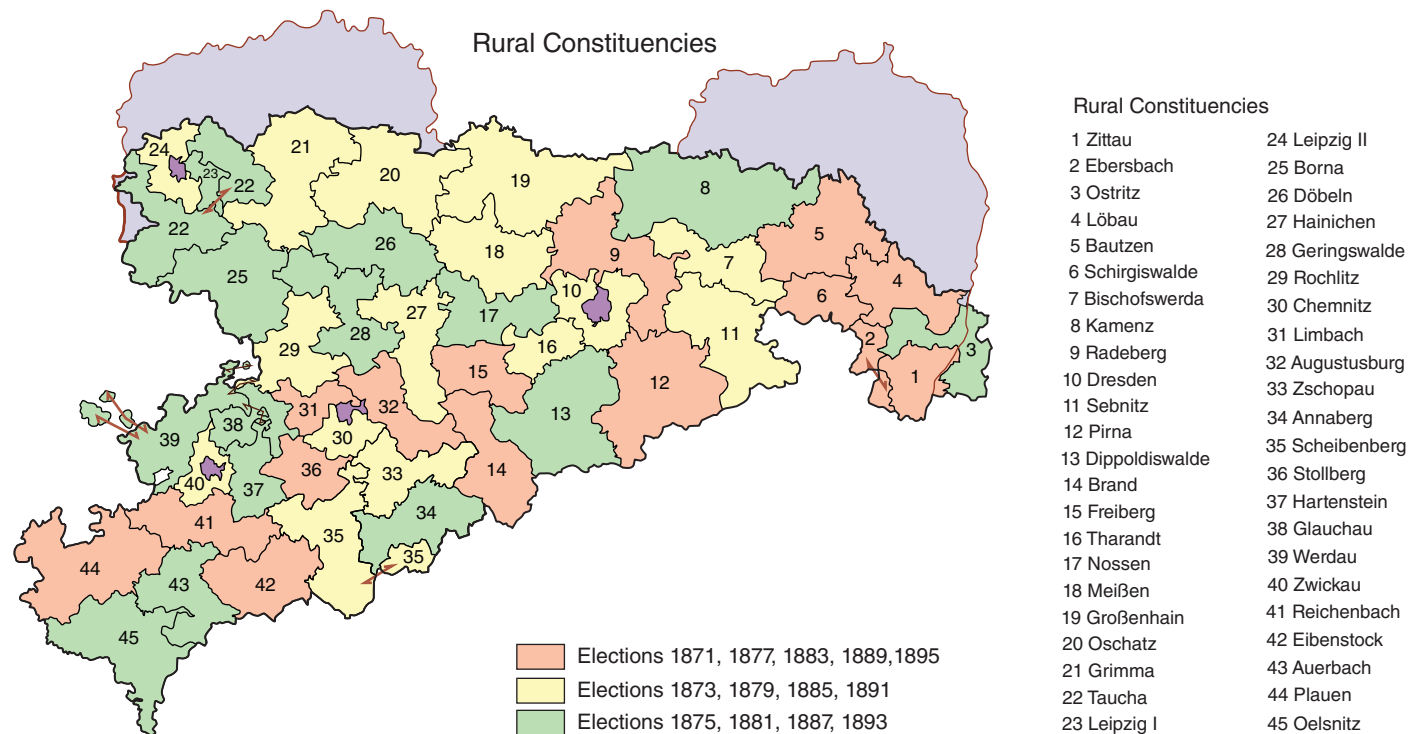


Plate 4. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (rural).



## Urban Constituencies

- 1 Zittau (5)
- 2 Bautzen (6)
- 3 Bischofswerda (6)
- 4 Pirna (7)
- 5 Dippoldiswalde (15)
- 6 Freiberg (3)
- 7 Lommatzsch (5)
- 8 Oschatz (6)
- 9 Döbeln (4)
- 10 Frankenberg (3)
- 11 Grimma (8)
- 12 Borna (9)
- 13 Rochlitz (7)
- 14 Meerane (3 bzw. 4)
- 15 Glauchau (3)
- 16 Crimmitschau (2)
- 17 Ehrenfriedersdorf (7)
- 18 Zschopau (7)
- 19 Annaberg (7)
- 20 Schwarzenberg (6)
- 21 Reichenbach (4)
- 22 Netzsckau (5)
- 23 Plauen (3)
- 24 Adorf (6)

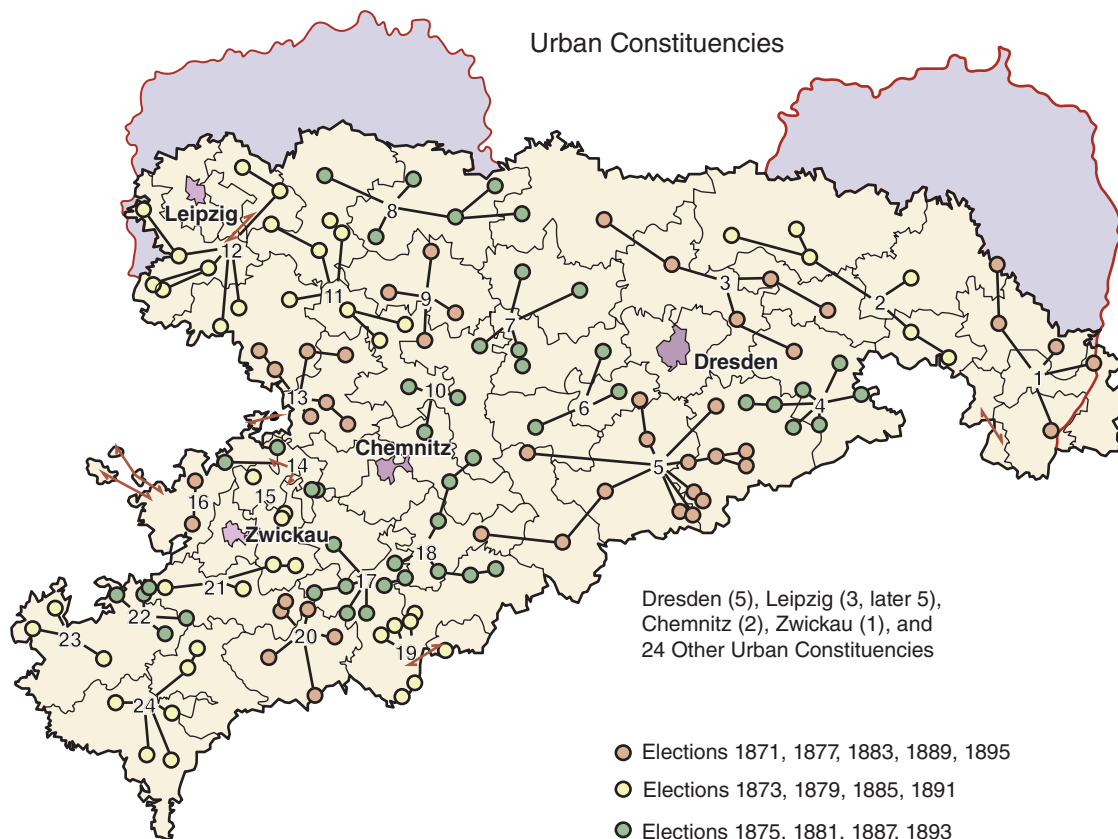


Plate 5. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1868–1909 (urban).

## Der Ausweg der Konservativen

(29. 29. Heine)



„Wenn Deutschland schon rot sein soll, so sei es rot vom Scheine der Kriegsfackel!“

**Plate 6.** “The Conservatives’ Last Resort.” The caption reads: “If Germany should become red, then it should be red from the glow of war’s torch.” The small figures wearing the distinctive working-class cap are emerging from a voting urn.

*Source:* Thomas Theodor Heine, “Der Ausweg der Konservativen,” *Simplicissimus* 15, Nr. 21 (22 August 1910): 341. *Simplicissimus Online:* Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.



**Plate 7.** “In Memory of the Reichstag Election of 1903.” This Social Democratic postcard commemorates the party’s victory in twenty-two of twenty-three Saxon constituencies in June 1903. At left, it shows the names of defeated non-socialist (Kartell) candidates, with a banner labeled “Landtag suffrage” and a cross labeled “Adieu for good!” The one black flag on the hilltop represents the victory of the antisemite Heinrich Gräfe in Bautzen. The caption reads: “I love you *so*, my Saxon land; you noble pearl in the German land.”

*Source:* Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, Postkartensammlung 6/CARD000258.



# Zu den Wahlrechtskrawallen

(24. 25. Seite)



„Das Kind ist ruhig. Es braucht nichts.“



„Das Kind schreit. Es kriegt nichts.“

**Plate 8.** “About the Suffrage Riots.” The caption reads: (Left): “The child is quiet. It needs nothing.” (Right): “The child is screaming. It gets nothing.”

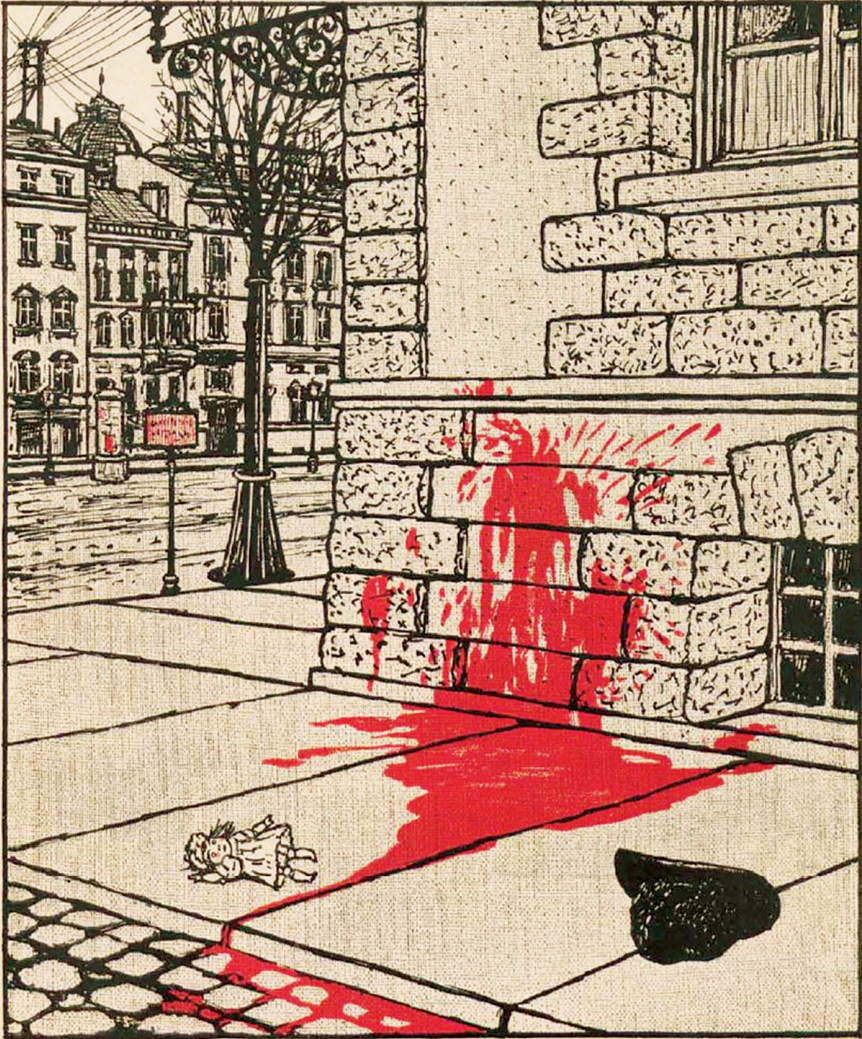
Source: Thomas Theodor Heine, “Zu den Wahlrechtskrawallen,” *Simplicissimus* 12, Nr. 45 (3 February 1908): 733. *Simplicissimus Online*: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

# Durchs dunkelste Deutschland

No. 20

Nach der Straßendemonstration

(Ed. Th. Heine)



Nur dem taktvollen und besonnenen Eingreifen der Polizei ist es zu danken, daß die Ruhe nicht gestört wurde.

Plate 9. "After the Street Demonstration (Through Darkest Germany. No. 20.)" The caption reads: "Only the tactful and cool-headed intervention of the police ensured that the peace was not disturbed."

Source: Thomas Theodor Heine, "Durchs dunkelste Deutschland. No. 20. Nach der Straßendemonstration," *Simplicissimus* 14, Nr. 52 (28 March 1910): 899. *Simplicissimus Online*: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.



# Verlesung des Wahlergebnisses

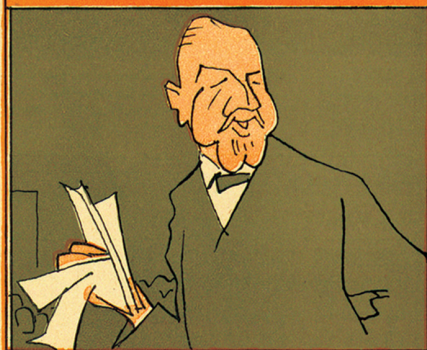
(Zeichnungen von Wilhelm Schulz)



„600 Liberale, 299 Sozialdemokraten — noch kennt das Bürgertum seine Pflicht!“



380 Liberale, 417 Sozialdemokraten! — Allerdings, meine Herren, nicht immer siegen ideale Interessen über materielle!



281 Liberale, 840 Sozialdemokraten! Es stehen aber noch viele Außenbezirke aus,



die allerdings vorwiegend der Arbeiterbevölkerung angehören — 47 Liberale — 1160 Sozialdemokraten —



— 114 Liberale — 2018 Sozialdemokraten — — Sei's drum, man muß die Stimmen wägen und nicht zählen.



Und uns soll auch dieses Ergebnis nicht entmutigen, im Gegenteil, aus solchen Niederlagen werden uns frische Kräfte erwachsen!!“

**Plate 10.** “Reading of the Election Result.” The caption reads: (left to right, top to bottom): “[A] 600 liberals, 299 Social Democrats—the bourgeoisie still knows its duty! [B] 380 liberals, 417 Social Democrats!—Alright, gentlemen, ideal interests don’t always triumph over material ones! [C] 281 liberals, 840 Social Democrats! But a lot of outlying districts haven’t reported yet, [D] though they have a predominantly working-class population—47 liberals, 1,160 Social Democrats—[E]—114 liberals—2,018 Social Democrats—Anyway, one must weigh the votes, not count them. [F] And this outcome should not dishearten us; on the contrary, we will gain fresh strength from such defeats!”

Source: Wilhelm Schulz, “Verlesung des Wahlergebnisses,” *Simplicissimus* 16, Nr. 40, Wahlnummer (1 January 1912): 720. Simplicissimus Online: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

# Die rote Saxonia

(Ed. Th. Heine)



„Nee, meine kuteſte Borussia, ſchaffe dir ja nich ſo ä neuen Waſtdopp an, ich habe von meinen de Waſern gekrieht.“

Plate 11. “Red Saxonia.” The caption reads (in Saxon dialect): “No, my good Borussia, don’t pick such a new voting pot for yourself; mine gave me the measles.”

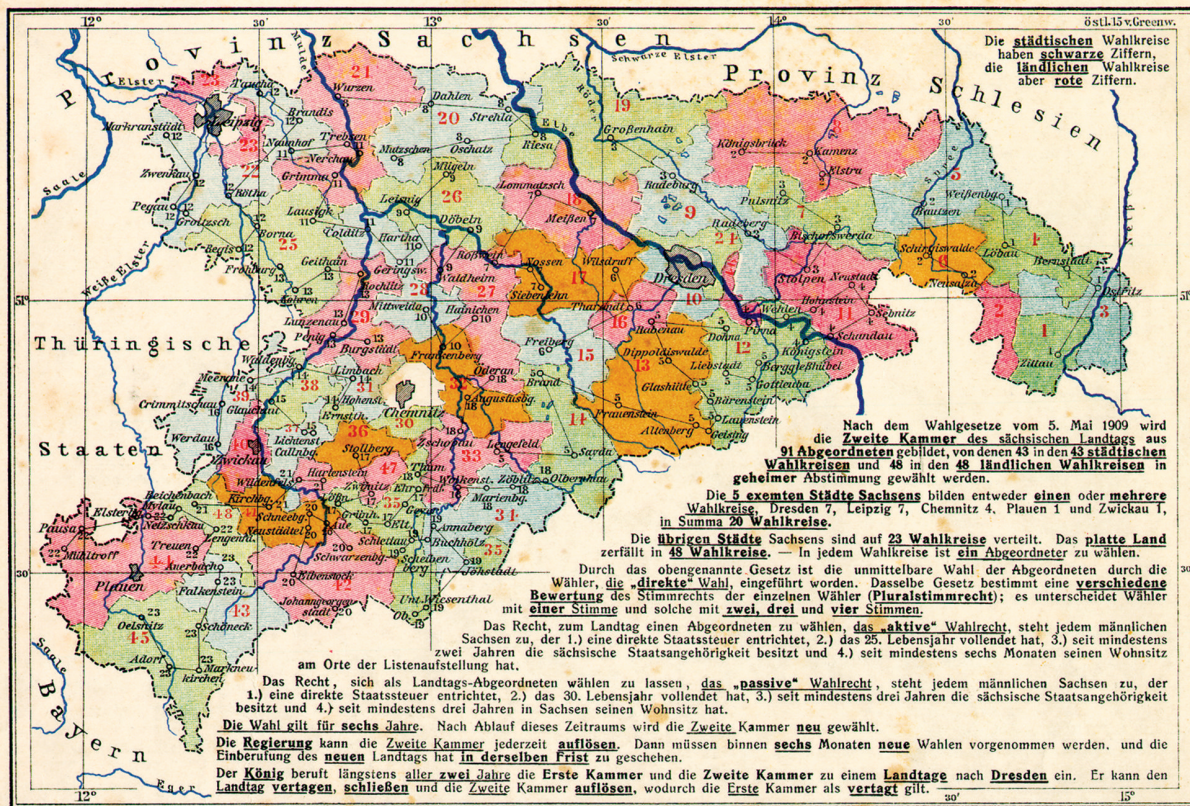
Source: Thomas Theodor Heine, “Die rote Saxonia,” *Simplicissimus* 14, Nr. 34 (22 November 1909): 567. [Simplicissimus Online](#): Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.







## Die 91 Landtagswahlkreise im Königreiche Sachsen.



(Ein Beispiel für die **Einteilung eines Landes zur Erwählung seiner Volksvertreter im Landtage**.)

Plate 13. Landtag Constituencies in Saxony, 1909.

# Saxon Landtag Elections, 1909

## Rural Constituencies

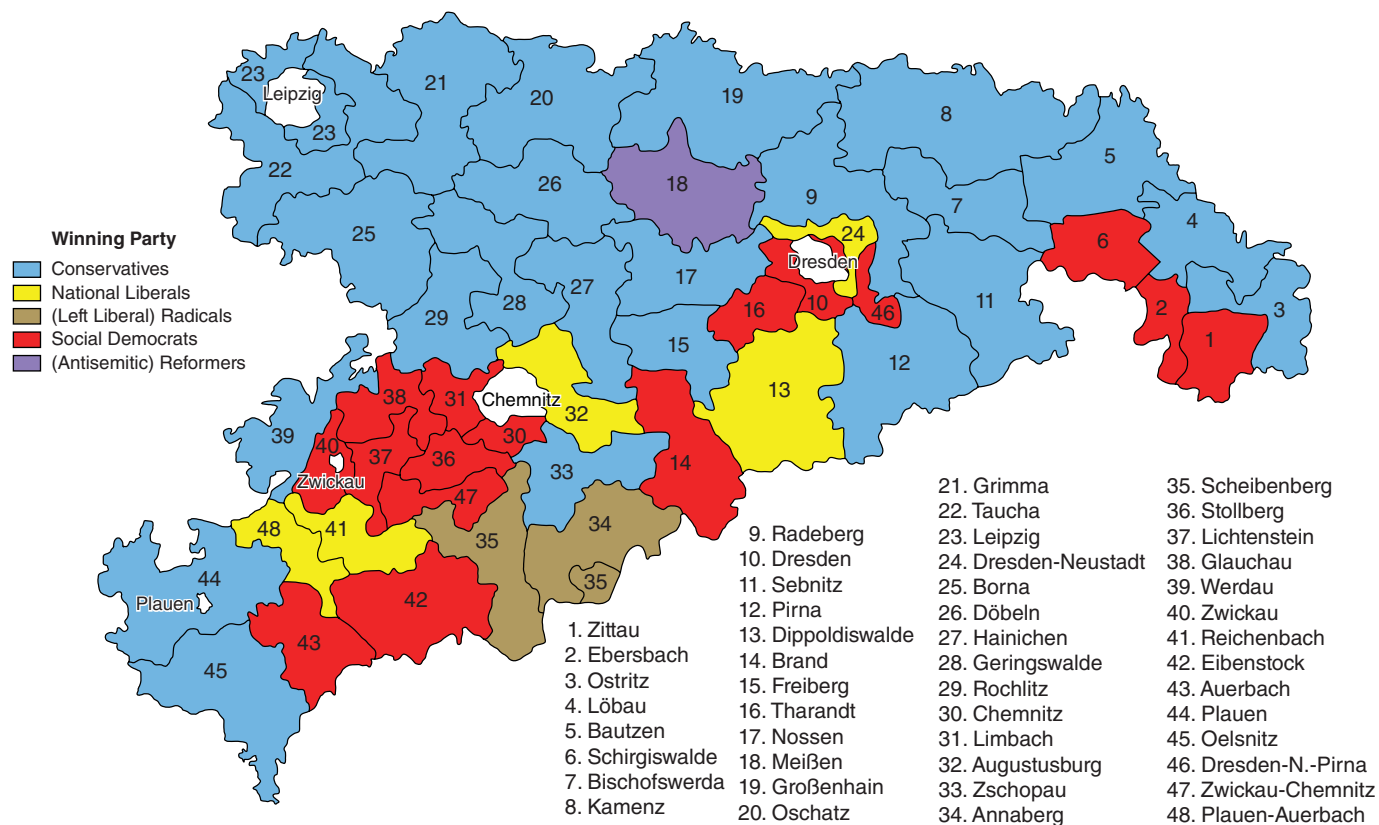


Plate 14. Landtag Election Results in Saxony (rural), 1909.

# Saxon Landtag Elections, 1909

## Urban Constituencies

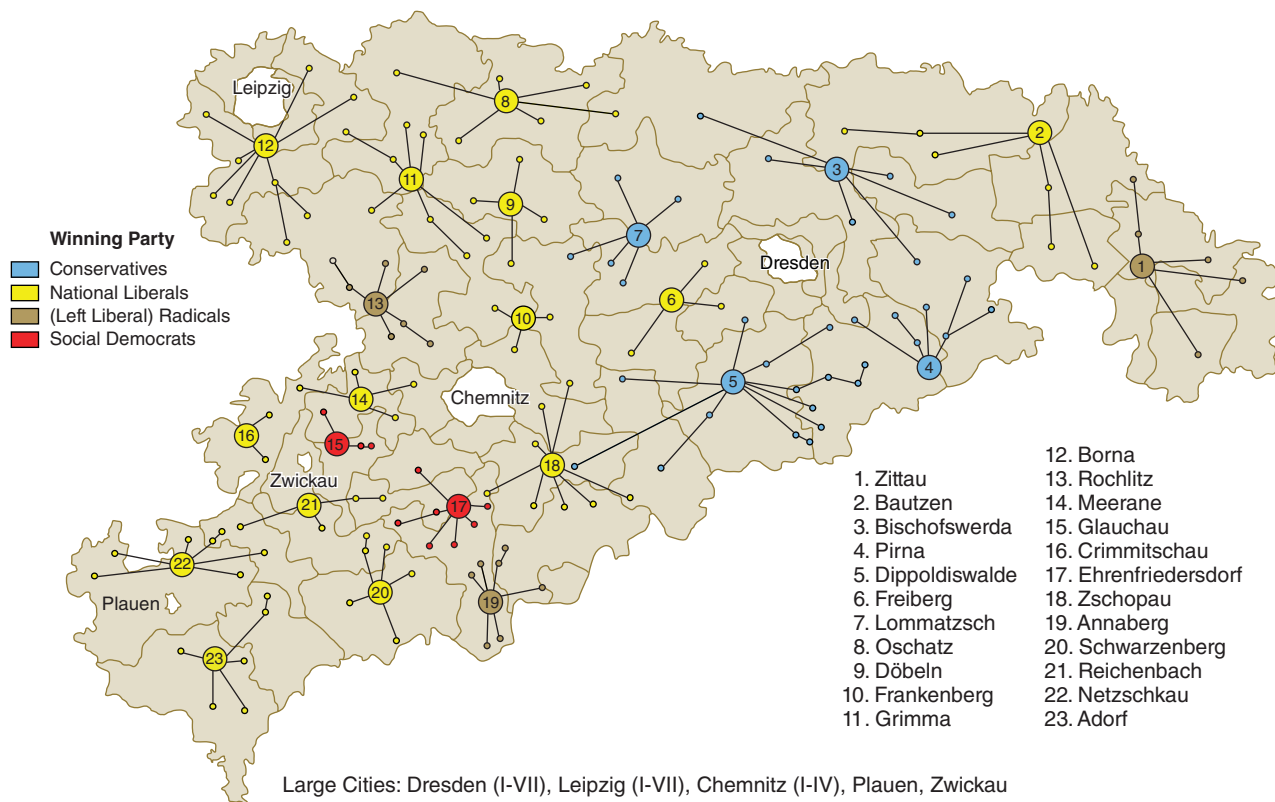


Plate 15. Landtag Election Results in Saxony (urban), 1909.

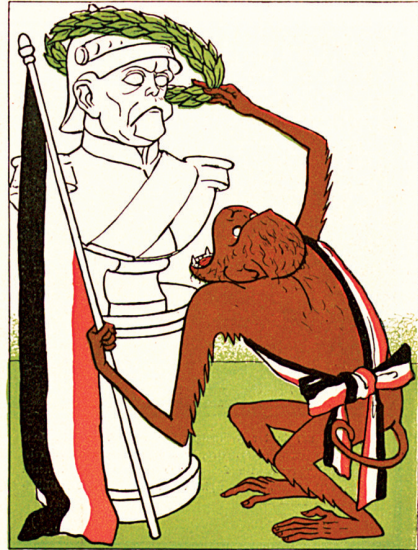


# Die Entwicklung des Nationalliberalen

(Zeichnungen von Th. Th. Heine)



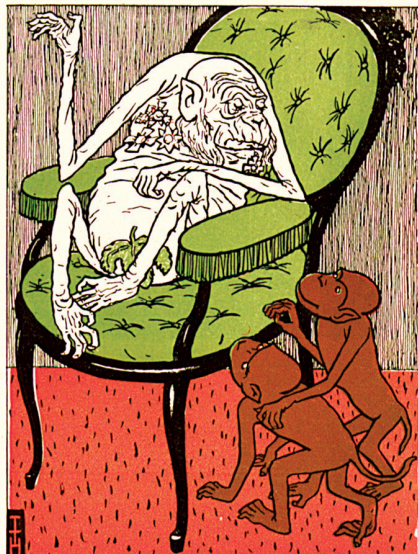
1848: Der erste Nationalliberale



1871



20. März 1890



Der letzte Nationalliberale:  
„Ja, liebe Enkel, es war eine große herrliche Zeit!“

**Plate 16.** “The Evolution of the National Liberal.” In the course of its domestication, German National Liberalism shakes off its revolutionary origins, becoming Bismarckian, anti-Bismarckian, nostalgic, and decrepit. The caption reads: (left to right, top to bottom): “1848: The first National Liberal. 1871. 20 March 1890. The last National Liberal: ‘Yes, dear grandchildren, it was a great and glorious time!’”

Source: Thomas Theodor Heine, “Die Entwicklung des Nationalliberalen,” *Simplicissimus* 8, Nr. 53 (1903–04), Extra-Nummer, Reichstagswahl, 4. Simplicissimus Online: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

# Introduction

The unity of place is only disorder. Only the unity of problem makes a center.

—Marc Bloch, 1934<sup>1</sup>

It's not the voting that's democracy, it's the counting.

—Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (1972)

By 8 p.m. on the evening of Thursday, 27 October 1881, a large crowd had gathered in the old market square in front of Dresden's city hall.<sup>2</sup> The crowd was growing more unruly with each passing minute. It had already spilled into the Postplatz and Wilsdruffer Straße as Dresdeners waited for officials to announce the outcome of the Reichstag election in the riding of Dresden-Old City, one of twenty-three such contests in the Kingdom of Saxony and 397 across the German Reich. By 9 p.m. some 5,000 people had gathered. The crowd included the usual suspects—youths—but police also complained that Dresden's more dignified citizens should have known better than to swell an already dangerous throng. Tension soon reached a fever pitch. The crowd knew the decision could go either way: to the wood-turner August Bebel, candidate of the socialist "party of revolution," or to the mayor of Dresden, Dr. Paul Stübel, the candidate of the right-wing "parties of order." Scattered "*Hails!*" to Bebel were shouted with increasing frequency each time the official announcement was delayed. As the evening wore on, the election commissioners feared that a declaration of Bebel's victory would result in violence and bloodshed. During the campaign, Saxon officials had used all means at their disposal to repress and harass Bebel's Social Democrats. The Social Democrats had responded with cloak-and-dagger tactics worthy of the best spy novels. When the result of the main ballot was announced late that evening, it confirmed that Bebel and Stübel would participate in a run-off election scheduled for 10 November. A tumult erupted. When police attempted to clear the Altmarkt, they met stiff resistance. They fired blank rounds at the crowd—without much effect. A nearby military detachment was called in and the square was finally

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Skocpol/Somers, "Uses," 194.

<sup>2</sup> Following details from PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Bde. 4–6; BHStAM II, MA 2850; PRO, FO 215/34; SHStAD, KHMSD 1067–8; Mdl 10998–10998a and 5379–80; SHStAD, MdAA 3295; SLUB, H. Sax. G. 199, 24; Marx, "Reichstagswahl"; Schüller, "Kampf," 130–50; Richter, *Geschichte*, 59f.; Klein, "Wahlprüfungen," 227–33.



cleared. An undetermined number of Dresdeners were injured in the fray. Twenty-nine people awoke the next morning in jail.

Two weeks later the election battle in Dresden was rejoined. A pair of gendarmes with fixed bayonets stood in front of each polling station. Voter turnout exceeded 80 percent. As evening fell, again a nervous crowd gathered in front of the city hall to await the election result, but this time the police were better prepared: they patrolled the Altmarkt with sabers drawn. When it was announced that Bebel had lost the run-off contest to Stübel, the expected socialist call to arms did not materialize. We cannot know whether this outcome cheered or dispirited Dresden's reprobate police commissioner, Georg Paul, who according to Bebel "hunted socialists for sport."<sup>3</sup> On the night of the run-off ballot, the commissioner was drunk—not only with the state's victory over revolution. He did his best to provoke Bebel's followers. Three months later, on the floor of the Saxon Landtag, Bebel declared that Saxony had never before experienced such "shameless" intimidation as during this campaign.<sup>4</sup> State authorities were squirming. One minister expressed outrage that "the socialist party, whose meetings have been dissolved and whose press has been rendered silent, in this way finds an opportunity to continue its rabble-rousing from the podium of the Landtag through the words of its most important leader."<sup>5</sup>

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The events of October and November 1881 reflected processes and attitudes that are taken up in the following pages. What does this book hope to achieve? What is its central thesis? What related arguments are put forward? How will they be substantiated?<sup>6</sup>

My overarching aim is to throw new light on the reciprocal relationship between political modernization and authoritarianism in Germany over the span of six decades. I have considered this relationship in previous work, but only a book of this scope allows me to explore it with sufficient focus and breadth. Here I advance a set of interrelated theses that run with the grain of recent research in some respects, and counter to it in many others.

My central argument is that political modernization need not lead to democratic rule. Readers may find this assertion less surprising than the ways I go about supporting it. I address longstanding questions about the speed and direction of political change in Imperial Germany. How was Germany governed in this era? How did fear of revolution push liberal and conservative parties together? How did Germany's party leaders and statesmen see their nation's future at key turning

<sup>3</sup> BAml, 787; Marx, "Reichstagswahl," 12–14; Schüller, "Kampf," 109.

<sup>4</sup> *LTMitt* 1881/2, II.K., 1:765 (9.2.82).

<sup>5</sup> Acting Austrian envoy to Saxony, Sigismund von Rosty, 13.8.81, HHStAV, PAV/43.

<sup>6</sup> The brief references in this Introduction do not reflect the extent of my scholarly debts. Neither does the list of Works Cited at the end of this book. Interested readers should consult Retallack, *German Right*; idem, *Germany's Second Reich*; idem, "Introduction" to idem, *Saxony*; as well as the longer Bibliography in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

points? And did the struggle against democracy before 1918 help make it possible for more ruthless politicians, later, to lead Germans into a fascist dictatorship, world war, and the Holocaust?

I propose to answer these questions with three inter-related sets of claims and three complementary strategies to support them. In each case I speak of the Kingdom of Saxony as a useful laboratory. Scholars who study Saxony can rethink old questions and pose new ones. For Germans a hundred years ago, Saxony was a laboratory for testing different suffrage regimes. This Introduction is not the place to say precisely how *that* experiment turned out; but some general points can be made.

## ELECTION BATTLES AND DEMOCRATIZATION

My first claim is that election battles were fought so fiercely in Imperial Germany because they reflected two kinds of democratization: social democratization and political democratization. I consciously avoid choosing a single meaning of the word “democracy.” As one scholar has noted, the term democracy is promiscuous: “If there is one true meaning, then it is, indeed, as Plato might have said, stored up in heaven.” The concept of democracy is (and might always remain) contested, even though its origins lie in the Greek terms for “the people” (*demos*) and “rule” (*kratos*). Usage of the word need not be avoided entirely. In this book, I explore the degree of historical congruence between democracy understood as a set of values, and democracy understood as an institutional arrangement.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I prefer to discuss democratization as a process. That process included two strands that need to be distinguished from each other—and then woven together again.<sup>8</sup>

The first strand is *social* democratization. By this I mean the fundamental politicization of German society, whereby more and more Germans were pulled into the world of political activity. As Germany’s industrial revolution reached maturity after 1860 and as voluntary associations expanded, the fundamental politicization of society was reflected in the growth of mass parties, a more vibrant public sphere, the penetration of politics into the countryside, and rising turnout rates when Germans were called to the polls. The second strand is *political* democratization, which implies some degree of constitutional reform. This process took a quantum leap forward in 1866–7, when Bismarck granted universal manhood suffrage for elections to the Reichstag.<sup>9</sup> Even before the unified nation-state

<sup>7</sup> The preceding terms are drawn from Crick, *Democracy*, 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> On the authoritarian state and the “political mass market,” see Retallack, *Germany’s Second Reich*, ch. 9. The fundamental politicization of German society was explored in Mannheim, *Man and Society* (orig. 1935), esp. 44, and idem, *Essays*, esp. 171–80. See also Steinbach, “Einleitung” to idem, *Probleme*, and Kühne, “Jahrhundertwende.”

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the Reichstag of the North German Confederation (1867–1871), which then became the Reichstag of the German Empire (1871–1918).

existed, Germany had a more democratic suffrage than almost any other national parliament in the world.<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, the advance of political democratization was contested at every turn. It could even be halted or reversed—at least on a sub-national level. Time and again, the enemies of democracy attacked universal manhood suffrage as subversive and un-German.

Social democratization could not be stopped. Over time, the penetration of politics to all levels of society provided many Germans with reasons to denounce political democracy or actively oppose it. One reason election battles became so ferocious between 1871 and 1918 is that social democratization speeded up while political democratization slowed down. These developments were reciprocal. Social democratization, not its lack, gave anti-democrats an incentive to find each other and unite against the most conspicuous hallmark of democracy: a freely elected parliament to which government leaders are responsible. Due to the efforts of democracy's enemies, parliamentary government did not come to Germany until 1918–19.

I examine German elections as a means to an end—to discern the trajectories of democratization at a particular time and place. It has been said that history is a mansion with many rooms. The study of elections provides an interpretive key. It may not be a skeleton key, but it opens more than one door.

Elections are historically important in their own right, of course. Even in political systems that are not democratic, elections are often the most recognizable face of struggles for power. They have a crucial transmissive function between society and the state. Elections also allow us to study society as the aggregate of its constituent groups, which are sometimes referred to as voting blocs. Scholars have developed sophisticated computational methods to study these blocs; but such analysis is often difficult for non-specialists to penetrate. No regression analysis is found between the covers of this book. The reader is asked to do no statistical heavy lifting. I pursue a different set of questions with a more eclectic kind of election analysis. Of these questions, one stands out: Why was it so important that certain groups had the right to vote and certain groups did not?

This question is tantalizingly simple at first blush. Having the right to vote meant that one lived in a democracy. Really? This confident assertion prompts immediate caveats. The first is that voting laws—and all the thresholds to enfranchisement they erected—were different at the local, regional, and national levels. Political cultures varied enormously across Imperial Germany with its twenty-five federal states (*Bundesstaaten*). (See Map I.1 at the end of this Introduction.) In every one of them, and in the Reich (empire) as a whole, the question of who belonged to the electorate and who was excluded from it had far-reaching ramifications. Moreover, casting a vote did not fundamentally influence the dispersal of power and decision-making authority. What, then, does it mean to say that Germans were habitual voters?<sup>11</sup> Few political systems are either fully democratic or completely undemocratic. Democratic elements can be combined in many ways.

<sup>10</sup> A similarly broad suffrage was found in Greece after 1844 and France after 1852.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. Suval, *Politics*; Anderson, *Democracy*.

This book devotes particular attention to one kind of semi-democratic voting system, whereby a general and equal suffrage (for the Reichstag) was combined with limited and unequal ones for state-level and municipal parliaments. In some chapters I focus on efforts to rescind or revise the Reichstag's universal suffrage. In others I concentrate on efforts to revise subnational suffrages by awarding extra ballots to certain privileged electors. When these efforts are considered together, they reveal how Germans thought they could combine democratic and undemocratic aspects in a single political system.

My analysis focuses on the Kingdom of Saxony: Imperial Germany's third-largest federal state (after Prussia and Bavaria). Saxony's territory comprised roughly 15,000 square kilometers, not much bigger than the state of Connecticut and slightly smaller than Kuwait or Swaziland. But Saxony was home to about five million people in 1913, making it almost as populous as each of Denmark, Finland, and Scotland are today.

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This is a good point to address terms used in this book's subtitle. In a minor key, I speak of the "spectre of democracy" as the ghost of something that is dead—rather like Hamlet's father, who roamed the battlements of Elsinore castle at night. In this sense, democracy was the ethereal embodiment of the French Revolution of 1789 and its principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It was the bloody residue of France's Reign of Terror under Maximilien Robespierre. It was the ghost of Napoleon, whose armies brought Germans to their knees between 1806 and 1814. And it was the nightmare of revolution in 1848–49—another episode of lawlessness and violence. In a major key, by contrast, I speak of the spectre of democracy as a frightening prospect—something that might assume living form in the *future*. After all, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were looking forward, not backward, when they famously pronounced in 1848 that "a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism." By this reading, democracy would be the bogey Germans found after a leap in the dark, after the violent overthrow of the existing political order, after a revolution had eliminated all social distinctions.

"Election battles" were of two types. The first type were battles that took place after an election had been called and an election campaign begun. As we will see, election campaigns unfolded according to different rhythms and rules for Reichstag and Landtag elections. Prognoses about winners and losers made at the outset of a campaign were often disastrously wrong. The second type of battles were fought over suffrage laws. Attack and defense was the order of the day here too: defending an existing voting scheme could be just as advantageous as devising a new one. Bringing these two types of election battles together in a single analytical frame provides one more way to show how Germans thought about their political system and tried to change it. Election battles forced different groups of Germans to look back—to lessons learned in the previous war—and to look forward, imagining how their future could be improved in a new suffrage regime.

Sometimes these groups reached consensus. More often, they fought. They fought about whether the penetration of politics into all layers of society and all

corners of the nation was a good thing or bad. They also fought about what social democratization really meant and how it might be controlled. Could it be steered into safe channels? Or was it leading Germany to social upheaval and political ruin? These were immensely complicated, daunting questions. By examining these two kinds of election battles together, we can begin to understand why so many Germans were persuaded to accept suffrages that were not democratic. If Saxony was a laboratory where different suffrage regimes were tested, the experiment yielded a similar outcome elsewhere in Germany. In spite of suffrage reform movements after 1900 that challenged the political status quo in Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, and Baden—Germany's five largest federal states—not one of these states had a parliamentary system based on democratic principles before November 1918.

The sociologist Max Weber wrote in 1917 that Germany still constituted “a nation *entirely lacking in any kind of political education . . . [and] entirely without any political will.*”<sup>12</sup> One scholar has noted that Weber's verdict was too damning. Instead, strict adherence to elaborate rules of electoral procedure provided “the early handholds, the rough crevices in the smooth system of authority, which allowed some groups of voters as early as the 1870s to gain a purchase on the wall of *Obrigkeit* [authority].”<sup>13</sup> The metaphor is illuminating. What it fails to convey is that the enemies of democracy did their utmost to fill in those handholds, smooth those crevices, and loosen the grasp of democrats trying to conquer the bastions of authority. Democracy's enemies were aided in this task by the harsh political climate of authoritarianism. This casts doubt on the thesis that advocates of democracy were successfully turning the weapons of the old order upon itself before 1918. Like a storm lashing our climber from all sides, anti-democratic practices and strategies increased the slipperiness of the face of the authoritarian state. They weakened the resolve of all but the most resilient adventurers to continue the upward struggle. That this ascent continued at all is of profound historical significance. Without question it deserves our attention. As one scholar has written, “If citizens are to act individually and in associations, especially in a democracy, to protest and block any sign of governmental illegality and abuse, they must have a fair share of moral courage, self-reliance, and stubbornness to assert themselves effectively.”<sup>14</sup> Precisely because we value these qualities so highly, as historians we should not diminish the durability of obstacles that lay in the path of those for whom we reserve our most enthusiastic cheers.

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A political scientist once quipped that trying to define political culture is like trying to nail a pudding to the wall.<sup>15</sup> By speaking of political culture, we signal an interest in exploring the subjective dimension of politics: the social-psychological ambience of a system of rule, the subjective relationship between the state and its citizens, and

<sup>12</sup> Weber, *Political Writings*, 144 (original emphasis).

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, “Voter,” 1460.

<sup>14</sup> Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” 15.

<sup>15</sup> Kaase, “Sinn”; cf. idem, “Analysis.” Cf. Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur*; idem, “Überlegungen.”

the system of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and sentiments that seem self-evident to groups and people involved in political activity.<sup>16</sup> Political culture research posits no clear separation between the social and political dimensions of life; it is closely and logically associated with research on (political) social cultures, (political) mentalities, and (political) ways of life.<sup>17</sup> In this book I use “electoral culture” (*Wahlkultur*) as a conceptual tool to explore political modernization and both kinds of democratization. This concept was first used by Thomas Kühne in his study of Prussia’s three-class suffrage. He defined electoral culture as the “values, norms and concepts that link a society to the act of voting, to the right to vote, and to the election campaign itself.”<sup>18</sup> Right away it is important to know whose values and norms we are talking about. Other studies of German elections have focused on the habits that were ingrained in voters by frequent visits to the polling booth or by the movement of large blocs of voters from one party to another. We now know a great deal about the look and feel of elections at the grass-roots level and about voters’ motives for casting a ballot. In this book I am more interested in the subjective dimension of politics at a higher level of political activity. My focus falls on the leaders of political parties, civil servants (at all ranks), and state ministers. Concentrating on high politics need not neglect the social bases of political parties or the grass-roots manifestation of social democratization. On the contrary. The social history of politics should look at society from the bottom up—all the way to the top.

The study of elections brings high and low politics together. In Reichstag elections, virtually all adult males were enfranchised. But in most state parliaments and city councils, suffrage laws excluded certain potential voters or ranked them according to their socio-economic status. As we will see, Saxon civil servants and legislators developed the manipulation of suffrage laws into a fine art. By this means they ensured that Social Democrats never came close to winning a parliamentary majority. But they were unable to disguise the political allegiance of voters.<sup>19</sup> Those allegiances can be mapped down to the level of individual precincts—such is the quality and quantity of election data provided by royal statistical offices in Imperial Germany. These data allow us, for example, to say that in the Saxon Landtag election of October 1909, precisely 53.8 percent of voters supported candidates of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Bare facts like these are only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>20</sup> Later in this book we dive down to examine related issues, such as the socio-economic status and political orientation of voters who chose to support a group—socialists—who were

<sup>16</sup> Kühne, “Wahlforschung,” 54; Kaase, “Sinn”; Reichel, “Einleitung,” 9; Berg-Schlosser/Rytlewski, “Political Culture,” 3; Rohe, “Regionalkultur,” 126; Sarcinelli, *Symbolische Politik*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Iwand, *Paradigma*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> KDWR, 30ff.; cf. Kühne, “Wahlforschung,” 54f.; idem, “Wahlrecht,” 543ff.; idem, “Entwicklungstendenzen.”

<sup>19</sup> That is, irrespective of the number of ballots they were entitled to cast.

<sup>20</sup> As I explain in Chapter 12, we can also say that in Saxony’s four-ballot election system, precisely 77.6 percent of voters who had only one ballot to cast voted for SPD candidates in 1909. See Table 12.12.

characterized as “enemies of the Reich.” To address those issues, we need to examine both kinds of election battles within the conceptual framework of electoral culture. Only then can we say with confidence why those voters wanted to lodge a protest against the establishment. And only then can we understand the motives of anti-democrats who devised suffrage thresholds to disenfranchise groups they designated as dangerous. Even the historian of high politics needs to examine the warp and woof of electoral culture to discern its historical patterns.

## SOCIALISTS AND OTHERS

The growth of Germany’s labor movement, with the Social Democratic Party as its central pillar, was the most important consequence of Bismarck’s decision to introduce universal manhood suffrage for Reichstag elections in 1867. We cannot understand one development without the other. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars focused their attention on the SPD and its remarkable growth. They demonstrated its ability to withstand discrimination and repression.<sup>21</sup> Before the rise of cultural history deflected attention away from the study of class conflict, scholars showed that the SPD’s effort to become a people’s party (*Volkspartei*) bore similarities to the Nazi Party’s aim to establish its own broad base of support. The Saxon case demonstrates that Social Democracy enjoyed wide support beyond the ranks of Germany’s working classes. It won over many fellow travelers, especially among the lower middle classes—the *Mittelstand*. At many points in this book I examine the middle ranks of German society as a battleground where Social Democrats and their enemies vied to win votes. My more original claim is about Social Democracy’s *symbolic* importance.<sup>22</sup> Socialism frightened Germany’s upper-middle classes (bourgeoisie, or *Bürgertum*) because it was seen as a revolutionary hydra.

From 1871 to 1918 and beyond, Social Democracy seemed to embody modernity’s least attractive features: it was subversive, violent, revolutionary, irreligious, immoral, and un-German. Social Democracy—as the face of “modern times”—was not something that anti-democrats could grapple with in a final contest for power. Whenever its enemies lopped off one head, another grew back. When it was repressed for twelve years (1878–90) under the Anti-Socialist Law, its underground network flourished. Its leaders used parliamentary immunity and free debates in the Reichstag to speak to their followers. Every election setback suffered by the party

<sup>21</sup> For introductions, see Iggers, ed., *Social History of Politics*; Jefferies, *German Empire*.

<sup>22</sup> In this book I differentiate between anti-socialist and anti-democratic viewpoints. However, in Imperial Germany, the terms *Sozialdemokratie* and *Sozialismus* were used almost interchangeably, as were Social Democrat and socialist. The term *bürgerlich*, which can be translated as bourgeois, was frequently used as a political shorthand to denote all non-socialist (or non-working-class) parties, groups, and individuals. Since the 1980s a vast literature has grown up around the terms *Bürger*, *Bürgertum*, and *Bürgerlichkeit* (the condition of being a *Bürger*). For an English language introduction, see Sperber, “*Bürger*.” I recognize that “burgher” is a wholly inadequate translation of *Bürger*, but it is a necessary shorthand.

produced a great victory at the next election. Members of bourgeois society and representatives of the authoritarian state found no consensus as to which aspect of Social Democracy was more dangerous. For example, anti-socialists and antisemites came together to denounce the alleged affinity between Social Democrats and Jews. Germany, they claimed, faced the combined threat of a “red” (socialist) and a “yellow” (Jewish) international conspiracy. That German Social Democracy was the most powerful wing of the Second International made this label stick.

Anti-socialists offered many other prescriptions for restoring German political culture to health. All of them were proposed in a climate of fear and to meet an emergency situation; but otherwise they were based on different premises. Could the non-socialist parties put aside their differences at election time to match Social Democracy’s superiority in numbers and organization? If not, might it be better simply to outlaw the party? Or ban its members from parliament? Or do away with universal suffrage? Defenders of the authoritarian state disagreed among themselves about the bounds of legality and moral fairness. This was never more true than when elections battles were being fought. Those disagreements affected German parties across the whole political spectrum. Social Democracy was blamed for throwing the whole party *system* into disarray.

All sides in these political conflicts used martial metaphors to describe the symbolic importance of elections. Language established a close conceptual linkage between a party that had to be fought, conquered, and exterminated and a political system that after 1867 relied on election battles to select its parliamentary tribunes. In 1867 one democratic newspaper proclaimed that election campaigns now mimicked military ones: “Even the vote is a rifle, and ballots are also bullets.”<sup>23</sup> Almost fifteen years later the “election battlefield” in Saxony was described as “chaotic.” Symptomatic of this malaise were election tumults like the one in Dresden’s Altmarkt in 1881.

The imperial era differed fundamentally from the 1930s, when enemies of the state could be lined up against a wall and shot. But even in Imperial Germany the war against socialism tended toward guerilla tactics and covert operations. It also illustrated elements of warfare that force us to think about continuity and discontinuity. Party generals, like military ones, were often fighting the last war. They also worried about a “quiet” civil war. According to this way of thinking, such a war proceeded in predictable stages: from agitation in the streets to victories at the polls to majorities in parliament and, finally, to “class legislation” that would overrun the existing social and economic order. The enemies of socialism were willing to consider almost any suffrage laws and repressive practices that promised to hold the line, to protect the rear, to turn the flank.

The perceived threat of socialism was nowhere more acute than in the Kingdom of Saxony. Neither the Anti-Socialist Law in the 1880s nor the appearance of nationalist pressure groups over the next twenty years could slow the growth of Social Democracy. In the Reichstag elections of 1903, socialists swept all but one

<sup>23</sup> *Volks-Zeitung*, 30.8.67, cited in Steinbach, “Elections,” 119. See also Chickering, “Militarism.”



of Saxony's twenty-three constituencies. The epithet "Red Saxony" was born. Within a year, so was the Imperial League against Social Democracy. Although the socialists' opponents had already declared many times before that the existing social and political order was under siege, the anti-socialist card was played more frequently after 1903. Meanwhile, antisemitism penetrated deeper into the Saxon Right, not only capturing the allegiance of significant portions of the *Mittelstand* but becoming a stock-in-trade of the Pan-German League and other radical nationalist organizations that drew their strength from the middle and upper-middle classes. After 1918, the participation of Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic's government coalitions had a cross-cutting effect, as did the prominence of Jews such as Walther Rathenau in the new regime. The stab-in-the-back legend reinforced the idea that socialists, democrats, and Jews had poisoned the home front between 1914 and 1918 and delivered Germany to the Allies in 1919. Ten years later, Hitler became the impresario of attacks on Marxists and the Jews. Now Saxony provided an early election breakthrough with the poles reversed: the Nazis were on the march.<sup>24</sup> I do not claim to have discovered the key to the Nazis' electoral success or the fateful decision to appoint Hitler chancellor in January 1933. My claim is a different one. The spectre of democracy—with socialism as its harbinger—was not born in 1933 or 1903. With the Paris Commune as its midwife, that spectre first appeared in 1871, and it was a *German* nightmare.

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In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars argued that Germany was on a "special path," or *Sonderweg*, to modernity. According to this thesis, in 1848 the German bourgeoisie failed to accomplish what the French had achieved in 1789. This failure allowed pre-modern elites to survive and thrive, which in turn paved the way for Nazism and the Holocaust. Since 1980, the *Sonderweg's* underlying hypotheses have been challenged and dismantled, one by one.<sup>25</sup> The German bourgeoisie was not supine or "feudalized" by Prussian Junkers and heavy industrialists. Germany did not diverge from the normal path of modernization in the West because there was no "normal" path in the first place. Agrarians and industrialists were not able to resist the economic pressures of modern industrial capitalism and the rising power of the German bourgeoisie. The new elites were not the old elites, but a spiral of demagoguery extending over many decades contributed to the radicalization of the Right.<sup>26</sup> Even German authoritarianism, upon closer inspection, turns out to resemble English, French, and American models of government, characterized by imperialist expansionism, extreme inequality among classes, and a willingness to go to war.

This dismantling of the *Sonderweg* thesis has been salutary; but the new consensus, which has sometimes been elevated to the status of a paradigm, is already beginning to look off-kilter. It is skewed toward a more positive appraisal of the

<sup>24</sup> Lapp, *Revolution*; Szejnmann, *Nazism*; Wagner, "Machtergreifung."

<sup>25</sup> See Blackbourn/Eley, *Peculiarities*. See also works cited in n. 30.

<sup>26</sup> See Retallack, *German Right*, passim.

Second Reich than the historical evidence warrants. Middle-class Germans could rightly boast that their public sphere was robust; but just as they valorized achievement, education, and culture, they also exhibited great respect for the state and fear of the working classes. This combination became a problem when political fairness was negotiated. Politically, German burghers were not dealing from a position of strength. When it came to representing their interests in German parliaments, the middle classes were not united. The older *Mittelstand* of peasants, artisans, and small shopkeepers sought to avoid sinking into a proletarian existence, while a newer *Mittelstand* of white-collar workers and commercial employees defined its own interests and aspirations.<sup>27</sup> Higher up the social scale, disagreements also arose between members of the propertied bourgeoisie, the educated bourgeoisie, and the civil service.<sup>28</sup> Each of these groups had its own image of Social Democracy and how it might be integrated into the political nation—or remain a pariah.

As this fracturing of Germany's middle strata became acute, fewer burghers paid heed to the ideals of social fairness or political inclusiveness. With the support of the authoritarian state, large sections of the German bourgeoisie took up the battle against democracy. To be clear: I do not suggest that German burghers *should* have sought equality or democracy.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, in this book I suggest why they rarely questioned the constitutional status quo; why they allocated the working classes meager representation in subnational parliaments; and why so many of them regarded socialism, democracy, and Social Democrats as existential threats.

The post-*Sonderweg* consensus distinguishes too neatly between the bourgeoisie's creative power, its "positive modernity" in the economic, social, and cultural spheres, and its inability to conquer power in the political sphere.<sup>30</sup> My conclusions therefore refute some elements of the *Sonderweg* thesis but confirm others, albeit in revised form. In the following chapters I try to study Germany's electoral culture with the state put back in. Doing so allows me to show that universal manhood suffrage for Reichstag elections was not necessarily conducive to parliamentarism and that "mass" politics could serve authoritarian aims as much as it did liberal aspirations. It also provides an opportunity to consider whether contending political groups had reached an impasse in July 1914. In this book's last two chapters, I document elements of stalemate after the 1912 Reichstag elections; but the Saxon case also suggests that skirted decisions in

<sup>27</sup> *Mittelständler* inhabited lower-middle-class layers of society; they generally enjoyed less wealth, status, and power than members of the *Bürgertum*.

<sup>28</sup> The *Besitzbürgertum*, *Bildungsbürgertum*, and *Beamtenbürgertum*, respectively.

<sup>29</sup> In leading the charge against the *Sonderweg*, Blackburn/Eley, *Peculiarities*, put it this way (90): "Rather than asking why the German bourgeoisie failed to act in an approved liberal way, we should ask ourselves why we should ever expect it to be liberal in the first place." Like this book, *Peculiarities* sought to restore a sense of contingency to German history while also noting that "the question about continuity is not *whether*, but *what kind*" (22).

<sup>30</sup> As noted e.g. in Hettling, "Relationship," 168; Jefferies, *German Empire*, 46; Eley, "German History," 77. Cf. the coeditors' individual contributions to Eley/Retallack, *Wilhelminism*. Recent efforts at stock-taking include Jefferies, *German Empire*; Retallack, *Imperial Germany*; Smith, *Oxford Handbook*; Müller/Torp, *Imperial Germany*; Jefferies, *Ashgate Research Companion*.

1917–18 were just as symptomatic of the authoritarian state's bankruptcy in a democratizing age.

Studies of Imperial German elections published since 1985 have argued that Weimar democracy emerged from successful democratic practices before 1918. Democratic affirmation, democratic habits, democratic rituals—these were allegedly ingrained during the Wilhelmine era. This book, too, is about transitions to democracy. But it emphasizes two other points. First, voices favoring democracy in Germany before 1918 did not join together in harmony, let alone a single melody: the strains of democratization produced discord. Second, other voices could be heard. They made the word democracy sound profane.<sup>31</sup> Democratizing tendencies were pervasive in Wilhelmine Germany's electoral culture, but opposing currents were stronger. Was democracy waiting in the wings? The question cannot be answered. Rather than chart democracy's "odyssey" toward something called modernity, we should attend to its more ambiguous, less uplifting episodes, for they did not lack their own drama.

## SAXONY AND THE REICH

The nineteenth-century sociologist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl warned his readers that "to see everything at once is to see nothing."<sup>32</sup> The poet Robert Frost agreed: "You can't be universal without being provincial."<sup>33</sup> Historians of Imperial Germany long ago learned to avoid claiming larger significance for their local study by describing it as typical or paradigmatic for the Empire as a whole. There is little value in tackling one neglected region if it raises no new questions or fails to illuminate a larger problem.

Hence: Why Saxony?

Early research for this book was driven by the excitement of working in Saxon archives in the 1990s, when sources from behind the Iron Curtain became freely available to western scholars. By the end of that decade, historical writing on Saxony stood ahead of writing on any other state formerly belonging to the German Democratic Republic.<sup>34</sup> But these developments are not the most important answer to Why Saxony? The Saxon kingdom stood geographically between Prussia and Austria: that gave it special prominence after 1848 when its leading statesman tried to establish a "Third Germany." This effort ended with Saxony's defeat by Prussia at the Battle of Königgrätz on 3 July 1866. But Saxony's "symbolic territoriality"<sup>35</sup> survived that reversal of fortune, for reasons that will be examined later in this book.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Anderson, *Democracy*, 20; Kühne, "Political culture," 193.

<sup>32</sup> Blackbourn, *Sense*, 23; Applegate, *Nation*; Applegate, "Nation," 41–3; Blackbourn/Retallack, "Introduction" to idem, *Localism*; Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Steinbach, "Politisierung," 321.

<sup>34</sup> See Retallack, "Society"; Retallack, "Introduction" to idem, *Saxony*; Lässig/Pohl, *Sachsen*.

<sup>35</sup> See Treinen, "Ortsbezogenheit"; Osterhammel, "Wiederkehr"; Schenk, "Maps"; Weigel, "Turn."

Regional history works best when it is used as a critical tool, not as a self-evident way to organize an enormous topic.<sup>36</sup> This book focuses on what Germans call a *Land*. Difficult to translate, this term had different connotations at different times. A *Land* can signify something as abstract as one's homeland—a larger incarnation of *Heimat*. But it can also refer to a federal state like Saxony, whose political borders were unchanging and undisputed in the period studied here.<sup>37</sup> This book examines political institutions for which the word *Land* is constitutive: state parliaments, state suffrages, state constitutions, state governments, even the Saxon equivalent of what in Prussia were called *Landräte*—local county counselors.<sup>38</sup> In other words, we are *not* concerned here only with invented traditions and imagined communities. Nevertheless, the subjective thresholds across which Saxons confronted Germany and the world are central to the argument. Real landscapes and mental maps—in combination—help us determine how Germans reconciled their attachments to smaller and larger homelands.<sup>39</sup>

Until now, Saxony has received less scholarly attention than Prussia, Bavaria, and Germany's southwestern states. It has been neglected in part because it does not fit the ascendant interpretive paradigm of German history—a paradigm that ascribes more liberal and “modern” political cultures to those regions lying west of the Elbe River or south of the Main River. This paradigm has contributed to what has been described as a democratic bias in German historical writing.<sup>40</sup> A false polarity has arisen, contrasting Prussia as a unique bastion of tradition and backwardness against the more liberal southwest. This contrast is made starker by a western bias, which induced historians to undertake research in the more accessible archives of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, and the Rhineland. As a result, scholars overvalue the coherence of the Prussian paradigm and misinterpret the significance of divergent political traditions outside Prussia. These biases and paradigms cannot accommodate a state like Saxony, which was bisected by the Elbe River and whose people felt culturally closer to Austria than to Prussia.

Saxony's atypical social development offers a special opportunity to place one region's political culture in a larger context. Along with the Rhineland and Silesia, Saxony was a pioneer in Germany's industrialization. It led all German states (except the city states) in its degree of urbanization, and its population density was exceeded by only a few other states in Europe.<sup>41</sup> These developments fostered class conflict of a particular type and significance in Saxony. With the rise of a large urban working class, Saxony became the cradle of the German Social Democratic

<sup>36</sup> Blackbourn, *Sense*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> This study is concerned with the Kingdom of Saxony, not with the Prussian province of Saxony or the small Saxon principalities of the Thuringian region.

<sup>38</sup> The German equivalents are *Landtage*, *Landtagswahlrechte*, *Landesverfassungen*, *Landesregierungen*, and (in Saxony) *Amtshauptmänner* for (Prussian) *Landräte*.

<sup>39</sup> Blackbourn, *Sense*, 20; Blackbourn/Retallack, “Introduction,” idem, *Localism*; Retallack, *Saxony*, chs. 1–4.

<sup>40</sup> Kühne, “Wahlforschung,” 47.

<sup>41</sup> See Plate 2 for a map showing Saxony's population density. For its geographic regions, industrial profile, and administrative regions, see other maps in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

movement after mid-century. By 1871 Saxony's political culture was already imprinted by the antagonism between the socialist labor movement and its enemies.

Other aspects of Saxony's social development offer new interpretive starting points. Saxony's population was overwhelmingly Lutheran yet paid allegiance to the Catholic Wettin dynasty. This dualism engendered religious and political antagonisms that would otherwise not be expected in a land where one confession was so dominant. Saxony also served as a transit zone for eastern European Jews emigrating to and through Germany in pursuit of a better life. Even though the proportion of Jews among the general population in Saxony was lower than the national average, Saxony was an early stronghold of radical antisemitism in Germany.

It is tempting, but mistaken, to squeeze Saxon history into a tale of two cities. Leipzig, with its university, publishing industry, and tri-annual trade fairs, was the locus of learning and money—*Geist und Geld*. Dresden was the seat of government and the home of baroque art treasures.<sup>42</sup> It exuded power and prestige—*Macht und Pracht*. These cities' competition for influence was intense. But many towns and villages had an industrial character by 1871. Chemnitz was the "Saxon Manchester"—dominated by bourgeois industrial entrepreneurs but surrounded by a quasi-industrial hinterland. Saxony's socio-economic profile has larger ramifications, one of which has already been mentioned. In Saxony, the bourgeois face of authoritarianism can be seen more clearly than in any other German land. Saxon history confirms the proposition that a bourgeois society may be perfectly compatible with a polity that falls far short of liberal democracy and whose citizens do not even aspire to achieve it.

Saxony's electoral culture was shaped by a suffrage reform discourse that did not lose its political salience at any point during the six decades under study. Saxony's 1868 suffrage was one of the most liberal in Germany. The 1896 reform copied the plutocratic features of Prussia's three-class suffrage. And the 1909 law—the most innovative of all—introduced multiple ballots for Landtag elections. Because the 1896 reform was so reactionary, Saxony in 1900 was known as the classic land of "suffrage robbery." It had demonstrated that democratization could be stopped in its tracks. It could even be reversed, as will be shown, by a coordinated attack on civil liberties and universal manhood suffrage. Based on initiatives emanating from Saxony, a coup d'état against the Reichstag and its suffrage was seriously debated by enemies of democracy in the mid-1890s.

Saxon history illuminates the push-pull relations among different political groups on the Right: parties, economic interest groups, nationalist pressure groups, and other voluntary associations. Here we can examine the anti-socialist Right without the analytical noise that strong Catholic or left-liberal movements introduce into the equation. For this reason Saxon history offers a corrective to social science theories about political modernization. M. Rainer Lepsius's theory of socio-moral

<sup>42</sup> Dresden was known as "Florence on the Elbe" (*Elbflorenz*), Leipzig as "Little Paris" (*Klein-Paris*), and Berlin as "Athens on the Spree" (*Spree-Athen*).

milieus postulated the existence of a liberal Protestant milieu; but such a milieu is hard to find in Saxony. Cleavage theory as developed first by Stein Rokkan can be challenged in each of its four principal aspects. And Saxony undermines the plausibility of political “camps” (*Lager*). Anti-socialist groups in Saxony *seemed* to constitute a nationalist camp—they displayed the classic hallmarks of a fortress mentality—but on closer inspection the image of a “national camp” begins to wobble.<sup>43</sup> What practical initiatives were based on a negative orientation toward Social Democracy? Why did observers so often lament the failure of nationalists to stick to their guns, to vote their conscience, when the chips were down? One answer is that the suffrage issue in Saxony remained unsettled, “up for grabs,” from 1866 until 1918. This peculiarity of Saxon history helps illuminate more general patterns of development in the Reich.

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We should not let down our guard against reductionism. Gerhard A. Ritter—an expert on Saxon elections—once described Saxony as a *Brennspiegel*.<sup>44</sup> He meant that Saxony’s history focuses attention on fundamental questions about Imperial Germany, but it also refracts them in new ways. Historical interpretation is kaleidoscopic: like shards of colored glass, evidence settles into unexpected patterns of meaning when twisted slightly toward a fresh perspective.

When I began research for this book, I knew that a Saxon twist on German history offered tangible benefits.<sup>45</sup> My confidence was not misplaced. As I have grappled with the larger questions of German history, I have drawn upon three methodologies that are not old-fashioned in the least. Regional history—first—has lived up to its original promise. It provides a means to push forward and integrate findings from studies pursued at the local, national, and international levels. A regional focus has allowed me to understand the resentments Saxons harbored toward Prussia and the Reich, as well as the countervailing dissatisfaction expressed in Berlin about Saxon laxity. At certain times, the common struggle against socialism and democracy brought Prussia, Saxony, and the Reich together. At other times, small-state parochialism and Prussia’s dominance in the Reich prevented Saxons from seeing eye to eye with their neighbors to the north. The different outcomes of suffrage reform in Saxony and Prussia in 1909 and 1910 confirmed that regional differences should remain in the foreground of this book’s analysis.

Second, I have embraced the challenge of writing a culturally-inflected history of politics. When party leaders and government ministers repeatedly asked one question—What is to be done?—their divergent answers indicated possible paths that political democratization might have taken. The situation reports written by envoys stationed in Dresden open a window on those possibilities. These diplomats

<sup>43</sup> Lepsius, *Demokratic*; Rokkan, *Formation*; Rohe, *Wahlen*.

<sup>44</sup> Literally, a concave mirror that concentrates light at one point and may be used to burn something.

<sup>45</sup> On the culture/power/territoriality nexus, see also Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 4.

were not indulging in mere chit-chat, nor were they interested in petarding Saxony's ruling elite. They were impact players in their own right, influencing policy in the court to which they were accredited. They became the confidants of statesmen who knew it was lonely at the top. Kings and state ministers who spoke with them were aware that their remarks would be reported to a third party, yet they clearly relished the opportunity to test their ideas and, sometimes, unburden their conscience. The envoys conveyed to foreign capitals the contingent plans, false appraisals, and wrong turns taken by these historical actors. The diplomats that German states posted in each other's capitals recorded the paths through which national issues entered Saxon political discourse and Saxony's politics were appraised in the rest of Germany.<sup>46</sup>

Third and last, my exploration of Saxony's political society convinces me that further work on Germany's middle classes will pay scholarly dividends. I believe such research will have to put more emphasis on the German bourgeoisie's ambivalence toward democracy, its antipathy to socialism, and its embrace of radical nationalism after 1900.

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The principal themes of this book—election battles, anti-socialism, and the meanings of “place”—run through every chapter. A chronological structure has been chosen because it offers several advantages.

If this book is about how Germans learned to cope with the challenges of democracy, it is also about how Germans reacted when those lessons failed to stick or were intentionally reversed. These learning processes were cumulative. Hence we cannot return to first principles when we move from the end of one chapter to the beginning of the next. The same point can be made about the leading actors in this study. They proceeded from defeat to victory by avoiding previous mistakes; they saw roadblocks and breakthroughs in the light of what came before and as another step on a long political journey. We need to follow these individuals forward through time. Nor can we appraise Germany's modernization simply by comparing its political culture in 1860 and 1918. In each decade covered by this book, the outcome of battles between challengers and defenders of the authoritarian state still lay open. Only careful attention to chronological development can attune readers to historical potentials that didn't work out but seemed enticing or fearsome to Germans at the time.

The sources for this book also provide chronological signposts that historians ignore at their peril. Certain statistical evidence makes sense only when aligned along specific timelines. Reports penned by diplomats must be calibrated to their years of service. And radical antisemites would have outraged public opinion if they had published broadsides in one decade that attracted relatively little comment ten

<sup>46</sup> See “Bismarck with Diplomatic Envoys of Germany's Federal States (1889),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5 (image): [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1410](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1410). On diplomatic reports as sources, see Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 2.

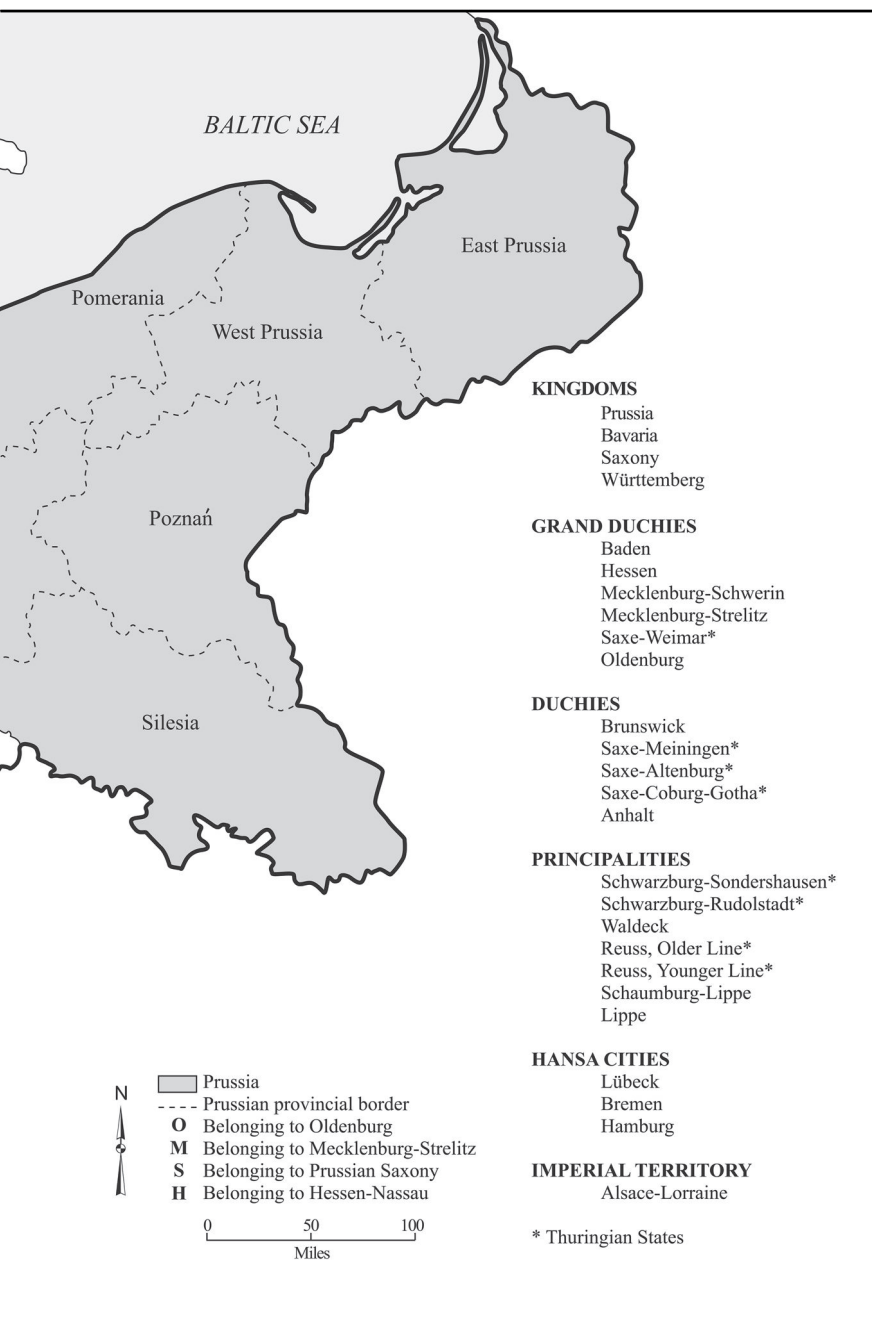
or twenty years later. A final point lies in chronology's favor. In this book I try to unravel a problem by unrolling a narrative. History books should be read, not just consulted. The central figures of this book and their ongoing struggle to meet new political challenges provide their own narrative momentum, pulling the reader forward through time.

For all these reasons, I start where Dorothy of Kansas was told to start when she arrived in the Land of Oz—at the beginning.





**Map I.1.** The German Empire, 1871–1918. © 2007, 2017 James Retallack / German Historical Institute, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.



# 1

## On the Threshold of a New Age

Early industrialization and the long-term social changes it wrought put Saxony in 1860 on the cusp of the modern era. The “German Civil War” of 1866, when Saxony shared Austria’s defeat at the hands of Prussia, changed Saxony’s international and constitutional standing more suddenly. The Saxon king appointed a new state ministry that had to accept Prussian hegemony in the North German Confederation (1867–71) despite retaining a strongly conservative outlook. During the Prussian occupation, Saxony’s four-party political system took on the contours it would retain for decades. All parties tried to cope with this first installment of Bismarck’s “revolution from above,” particularly his decision to introduce universal manhood suffrage for elections to a national parliament. That decision was not an easy or uncontentious one; but Saxon statesmen recognized that its ramifications in their kingdom would be far-reaching. As Saxon public life reawakened, many issues from the revolutionary period 1848–49 reappeared in new form: these included suffrage reform, the role of parliaments in national and subnational settings, and Saxony’s place in the emerging Germany.

These developments were tightly interwoven yet highly contingent: no one could have foreseen at the beginning of 1866 that Saxons and other Germans would be hurling invectives at each other by year’s end, when Germany’s first Reichstag election campaign was in full swing. Long before the German Empire was pronounced in January 1871, suffrage debates, constitutional upheaval, and an independent labor movement had all begun to transform German political culture. There was no turning back.

### SAXONY’S MODERNIZATION

It was the end of August 1865, early one morning, when we came to the gates of the great factory city of Chemnitz . . . Only a quarter of an hour away, we could still not discern anything of the city itself, for it was completely hidden in a thick veil of smoke and soot. None of us had ever seen anything like it: flakes of the stuff drizzled down on us like black snow.

—Christian Mengers, journeyman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Szalai, *Geschichte*, 2:41.

... This strange disease of modern life,  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims.

—Matthew Arnold (1853)<sup>2</sup>

Known as the “Saxon Manchester,” Chemnitz in 1865 was the kingdom’s largest urban-industrial agglomeration. Chemnitz’s extraordinary growth was mirrored in countless other Saxon towns and cities.<sup>3</sup> Saxony entered the imperial era as Germany’s third largest federal state by population (after Prussia and Bavaria), with about 2.6 million inhabitants; that figure almost doubled by 1914 to just under 5 million.<sup>4</sup> Except for the Hansa city-states, Saxony was also Germany’s and Europe’s most densely populated state, with 171 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1871.<sup>5</sup> This was much higher than the German national average.<sup>6</sup> If these observations help us situate Saxony within Germany, they run the risk of masking underlying distinctions among Saxony’s geographical districts, industrial sectors, institutions of government, and its inhabitants’ views on the “German Question.”

#### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Saxony’s northern plain was the home of agriculture and forestry. Except for the region around Leipzig, it was less densely populated than the rest of the kingdom. The high mountainous region directly bordering Bohemia in the south was also thinly settled. But the valleys and foothills of the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) provided the waterpower needed by small-scale industry in “rural” districts. Dresden was the center of an industrial district stretching along the Elbe valley from Pirna in the south to Meißen in the north. A larger triangular region in the southwest was Saxony’s most important industrial region. It was bounded by Chemnitz, Annaberg, and Plauen, with Zwickau at its center.<sup>7</sup>

By the 1860s Saxony had already undergone early, rapid industrialization. If we want to know what the Saxon “countryside” looked like after mid-century, we should listen to social observers who actually traveled to the weavers’ villages in

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, “The Scholar-Gypsy” (1853), l. 201.

<sup>3</sup> See “Population Growth in Large Cities (1875–1910),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 1: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1741](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1741).

<sup>4</sup> Saxony in 1871 had 2,556,244 inhabitants (in 1910: 4,802,485). Prussia’s 1871 population (in millions) was 24.7; Bavaria, 4.9; Württemberg, 1.8; Baden, 1.5. Saxony comprised 14,993 sq. km.; Prussia, 348,658; Bavaria, 75,870; Württemberg, 19,514; Baden, 15,081. See “Population Distribution by Size of Locality: German Reich, Prussian Provinces, and Federal States (1871–1910),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 1: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1738](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1738).

<sup>5</sup> And 320 inhabitants per sq. km. in 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Population density in the entire Reich was 76 and 120 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1871 and 1910, respectively. See “Population Density by Federal State and Prussian Province (1871–1910),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 1: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1740](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1740).

<sup>7</sup> See the Online Supplement for maps showing Saxony’s industrial profile and administrative regions: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. The latter included five main administrative regions (*Kreishauptmannschaften* or KHMS) and twenty-eight smaller districts (*Amtshauptmannschaften* or AHMS). Maps originally from Bruno Krause, ed. *Sächsischer Vaterlands-Atlas*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dresden, n.d. [c. 1912]), based on the census of 1.12.10.

Upper Lusatia (*Oberlausitz*) and to the hamlets nestled in the valleys of the Erzgebirge. There they found home weavers, other textile workers, miners, makers of children's toys, and thousands of other Saxons who would have been hard pressed to say whether they lived in a rural or an urban environment. In 1871, of Saxons living in "rural" areas, only about 30 percent were engaged in the primary sector (mainly farming and forestry). Fully 50 percent were engaged in industry, trade, or commerce. Many of them might have traveled to urban areas each day or sent their children to schools there, but after they returned home in the evening, either they or their dependents very likely tended a vegetable patch behind their home or kept a goat and chickens to supplement their income. Thus Saxony's demographic and occupational profile was marked by a high degree of interpenetration: of town and country on the one hand, of agriculture and industry on the other.

Saxony's industrialization was fueled by five key sectors that drove rapid economic modernization. The first of these was agriculture; the other four were mining, textiles, machinery, and publishing.<sup>8</sup> The mechanization of mining and textile production contributed to Saxony's pioneering role in metallurgy as well as its machinery, tool, and precision instruments industries. Saxon craftsmen gained a reputation for adapting easily to new technologies and large-scale productive techniques.<sup>9</sup> Yet more typical were small workshops turning out finished goods, probably with fewer than five employees, and situated not in large urban centers but in towns and villages. Saxony's highly industrial character belied significant overlaps: between handicraft manufacturing and mechanized factories, between journeymen and proletarians, between families dependent on male earners alone and those requiring spousal and child labor.

Should Saxon society in 1860 be called a class society? Yes, but with important caveats. In the agrarian sector, one of the most important social changes was the increasing number of farms owned by bourgeois rather than noble proprietors: even in the 1830s almost half of all knight's estates (*Rittergüter*) in Saxony were in non-noble hands.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, the sons of Saxon nobles were conspicuously willing to take up bourgeois occupations: the case of Wilhelm Aemilus von Schwanenflügel, who in 1870 became a railroad inspector in Zwickau, was not an isolated one.<sup>11</sup> As for the urban bourgeoisie (*Stadtbürgertum*) and its relationship with the working classes, it is difficult to separate the "old" urban bourgeoisie from the new one created by the influx of migrants from the countryside. Only a very small number of Saxons in the 1860s could be classified as proletarians—wage-earning workers bound to mechanized production in factories. Because of the continued importance of home work and the preponderance of small workshops, Saxony's urban proletariat grew relatively slowly. Its size has been estimated at less than 40,000 in the early 1860s.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Böhmert, "Vertheilung"; Kiewewetter, *Landwirtschaft*; Tipton, *Variations*; Zemmrich, *Landeskunde*.

<sup>9</sup> Tipton, *Variations*, 51–2.

<sup>10</sup> Flügel, "Rittergutsbesitz," esp. 82; Schnitzer, "Selbstbehauptung"; Keller/Matzerath, *Geschichte*.

<sup>11</sup> Weiss, *Bevölkerung*, 86.

<sup>12</sup> Czok, *Geschichte*, 347; Kocka, *Arbeitsverhältnisse*, 98; cf. Tipton, *Variations*; Herrigel, *Constructions*.

According to one scholar who has studied Leipzig's working classes, they had already formed themselves into a modern proletarian class before 1871.<sup>13</sup> Other research suggests a slower and more differentiated process of class formation.<sup>14</sup> In many Saxon towns, an artisan might occupy the office of mayor, a bookbinder might also own a bookstore, and a weaver might be his own commercial distributor.<sup>15</sup> Early census-takers generally failed to differentiate clearly between artisans, shopkeepers, and independent businessmen. Whereas the latter category might include a rich entrepreneur employing hundreds of workers, it might also include a barber or a chimney sweep.<sup>16</sup> Leaving these caveats aside, Saxony in the 1860s was already a mobile bourgeois society no longer constrained by traditional social estates (*Stände*).<sup>17</sup> In 1877 one liberal statistician assigned 73.8 percent of Saxons to the "impoverished" class; 23.1 percent belonged to the "middle" class, 2.5 percent to the "well-off" class, and 0.6 percent to the "wealthy" class.<sup>18</sup>

Describing Saxony's confessional profile is more straightforward. Saxony was an overwhelmingly Protestant (Lutheran) state. In 1871 a total of 53,642 Catholics lived in the kingdom, representing about 2 percent of the population (compared to about 36 percent in the Reich). The Jewish population of Saxony, totaling 3,346 in 1871, was concentrated in Dresden and Leipzig. The formal emancipation of Jews in Saxony occurred on 3 December 1868, seven months earlier than in the North German Confederation. Still, in 1871 the proportion of Jews among the Saxon population was miniscule in relative terms: 0.13 percent in Saxony, compared to 1.25 percent in the Reich.<sup>19</sup>

#### CONSTITUTION, MONARCHY, PARLIAMENT

In 1828 the Berlin satirist Saphir was asked what he intended to do when the world came to an end. He replied that he would "simply go to Dresden, where this, like so much else, will occur thirty years later."<sup>20</sup> Many Saxons in 1828 might have considered Saphir's quip a cruel joke: only meager political reforms had followed liberation from Napoleonic tutelage. Yet the rebellions in Dresden and Leipzig in September 1830<sup>21</sup> empowered the new ministry of Bernhard von Lindenau to inaugurate a wave of reform during the next decade, beginning with Saxony's first constitution of 4 September 1831. That constitution bore the hallmarks of others in Baden and Württemberg, on which it was loosely modeled.

Revolution in 1848 and the Dresden Uprising of May 1849 revealed that Saxons were eager for the liberalization of the 1830s to continue. Most liberal politicians in

<sup>13</sup> Zwahr, *Konstituierung*.

<sup>14</sup> Kocka, "Problems"; Weiss, *Bevölkerung*; Skinner, "Rhetoric."

<sup>15</sup> Bräuer, "Entwicklungstendenzen," 44–5.

<sup>16</sup> Weiss, *Bevölkerung*, 82–3.

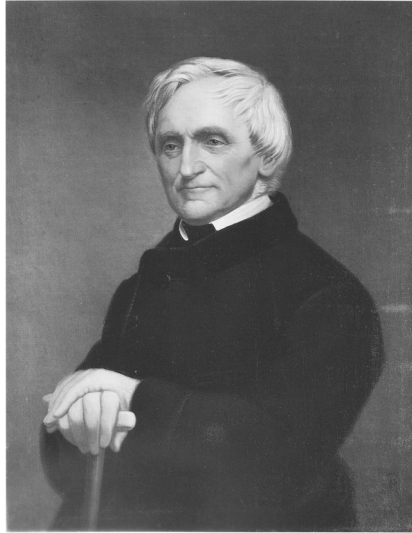
<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *Arbeitsbuch*, 130–5; Böhmert, "Einkommens-Statistik," 194–5; Fuhrmann, "Volksvermögen."

<sup>19</sup> See Schäbitz, *Juden*, esp. Table 5.1. Readers should keep these remarkably low figures in mind when the rise of antisemitism in Saxony and the Reich is discussed later in this book.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Czok, *Geschichte*, 332.

<sup>21</sup> Hammer, *Volksbewegung*.



**Figure 1.1.** King Johann of Saxony (ruled 1854–73). Oil on canvas by Luise Haenel von Cronenthal, 1867.

*Source:* *Zwischen Zwei Welten. König Johann von Sachsen*, ed. Sächsische Schlösserverwaltung and Staatlicher Schlossbetrieb Schloss Weesenstein (Halle a.S., 2001), 470.

Saxony during the late 1860s and 1870s first rose to prominence during the revolutionary tumults of 1848/49.<sup>22</sup> During the reactionary 1850s, the deep divide created in 1848/49 between opponents of the established order and its defenders persisted. Yet we must not extrapolate from the Prussian constitutional conflict of 1861–66 and draw a false polarity between a rigidly conservative regime and a radicalized liberal Landtag in Saxony. As one scholar has put it, liberals in Saxony's Landtag had their fingers in too many state pies to clench a credible fist against the government of Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust.<sup>23</sup>

"Modest" and "supportive": these terms aptly describe Saxony's Wettin dynasty and its historical role.<sup>24</sup> Saxony's monarchs exerted far less influence on the political life of their kingdom than did Prussia's rulers in Berlin. One reason was that the dynasty was Catholic but Saxony's population was overwhelmingly Protestant. After he ascended the throne in 1854, King Johann (Figure 1.1) typified other Saxon monarchs in his (acquired) understanding for Saxony's diminished international status, his obsession with state parsimony, and his willingness to leave the practical affairs of state to his leading ministers.<sup>25</sup> We may be thankful that

<sup>22</sup> Weber, *Revolution*; Schattkowsky, *Maiaufstand*; Neemann, "Kontinuitäten"; Jansen, "Forty-eighters."

<sup>23</sup> Neemann, *Landtag*, 232; cf. Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. IV.2.b.

<sup>24</sup> Blaschke, "Sachsen," 82.

<sup>25</sup> Blaschke, "Hof," 187–204; *SPN* 1, no. 12 (21.10.04), 2f. Cf. Green, *Fatherlands*, 145f.

Saxony's affairs of state were subject to "no court camarilla, no *éminences grises*, no shadow cabinet behind the scenes, no circle of favorites."<sup>26</sup> This created political terrain that was fought over by ministers of state, civil servants, and political parties.

The keystone of Saxony's 1831 constitution was its provision for a two-chamber state parliament, or Landtag.<sup>27</sup> Until 1918, the Landtag's upper house was always referred to as "the first chamber of the assembly of estates" (*Erste Kammer der Ständeversammlung*) and the lower house as the "second chamber." Arch-conservative members of the upper house reveled in applying the brakes to parliamentarism. A Saxon civil servant once noted that its "feudal lords, prelates, and canons seemed to personify the Middle Ages in petrified form."<sup>28</sup> In the 1860s Saxony's upper chamber had begun to give way to the House of Deputies as the site of Saxony's most compelling legislative battles. But the lower house, too, was beholden to the past. Between 1849 and 1866, reactionary state ministries led by Beust refused to recognize the Imperial Constitution and the catalogue of Basic Rights endorsed by the Frankfurt Parliament in the spring of 1849. This precipitated the Dresden Uprising of May 1849.<sup>29</sup> After that bloody conflict, new elections once again produced a liberal majority in the lower house, despite the ban imposed on the Democratic Party. In response, the Saxon government unleashed a coup d'état against the Landtag on 1 June 1850. It dissolved the democratically-elected Landtag but refused to call new elections; instead it reconvened the 1848 Landtag that had been elected on the basis of the 1831 constitution. It subsequently declared that the liberal suffrage which revolutionaries had legislated in December 1848 had been only a temporary, "provisional" measure.<sup>30</sup> Beust then subjected all newspapers and other publications to strict censorship. He also muffled independent voices in the civil service, implemented strict controls on clubs and public meetings, and coerced municipal counselors and administrators to toe the government line.

The Landtag's lower house was burdened by the past in another way. After the *coup* of June 1850, its suffrage was again based on representation according to social estates. Of seventy-five members (eighty after 1861), twenty were chosen from their own midst by owners of knight's estates: Saxony had roughly 1,000 such estates. Of the remaining deputies, twenty-five were elected by burghers in the cities who met certain criteria based on property ownership and tax exposure. Farmers elected another twenty-five deputies. Uniquely in Germany, five seats (ten after 1861) were reserved for representatives of industry and commerce. Active voters were drawn from a small class of males aged twenty-five and over. Since Jews had not yet won full citizenship rights, they joined the vast majority of the population excluded by other criteria from voting.

<sup>26</sup> Blaschke, "Sachsen," 101.

<sup>27</sup> Pache, *Geschichte*, 134–50; Schmidt, "Landtag"; Blaschke, "Landstände"; Blaschke, *700 Jahre, SPark*; Matzerath, *Aspekte*.

<sup>28</sup> Venus, *Amtshauptmann*, 22; cf. Schmidt, "Zentralverwaltung," 21.

<sup>29</sup> Schattkowsky, *Maiaufstand*; Schinke, *Charakter*.

<sup>30</sup> Schilfert, *Sieg*; Holldack, *Untersuchungen*, 91ff.; Neemann, *Landtag*.



## BEUST, BISMARCK, AND HIS MAJESTY'S LOYAL SERVANTS

From the moment Friedrich von Beust entered the reactionary Saxon cabinet in 1849 as foreign minister and helped quell the Dresden Uprising, he attempted to steer a path in both foreign and domestic policy that was staunchly conservative. It was always a policy fraught with danger.

Bismarck recognized in Beust a stumbling-block in the path to Prussian hegemony in German-speaking Europe: "If we can topple him we will do so sooner rather than later."<sup>31</sup> Whenever Bismarck or national liberals spoke of a future national parliament, to be elected on a broad suffrage, Beust replied that such a parliament should be a *Staatenhaus*, representing the interests of states, not the German people. The choice of representatives to sit in such a parliament should be made by parliamentarians already sitting in individual Landtage. This solution, Beust hoped, would quiet the "mania for parliament" that by the spring of 1866 was sweeping "all of Germany."<sup>32</sup> But Beust's decision to risk war against Prussia proved disastrous. Such a war was purportedly to defend the German Confederation against Prussian aggression.<sup>33</sup> The diplomatic situation was more complicated than that, of course, but by 15 June Prussian troops were streaming across the Saxon border and, soon thereafter, into Leipzig, Dresden, and other Saxon cities (see Figure 1.2). Less than three weeks later, on 3 July 1866, the German question was decided at the Battle of Königgrätz when Prussian forces routed the Austrian and Saxon armies.

Even after Königgrätz it required hard-nosed diplomatic negotiations, an odious Prussian occupation, and the appointment of a new Saxon ministry of state to determine whether Saxony would survive at all. If so, how would the rudimentary political parties in the Landtag respond to the lifting of Beust's repressive measures at home? And how would suffrage issues, election battles, and the consolidation of new parliamentary institutions affect the evolution of political culture in Saxony and the rest of Germany? The calamitous end of the Beust era made questions about their state's political future seem more vexing than ever. In the summer of 1866, Saxons were justified in sensing that they stood on the threshold of a new age.<sup>34</sup>

By twentieth-century standards the Saxon population suffered relatively little during the "German Civil War" of 1866.<sup>35</sup> No fighting occurred on Saxon soil after war was declared on 15 June. The Saxon army received deserved praise for its courageous fight in a lost cause at the Battle of Königgrätz. The preliminary peace accord agreed at Nikolsburg on 26 July promised to respect Saxony's geographical

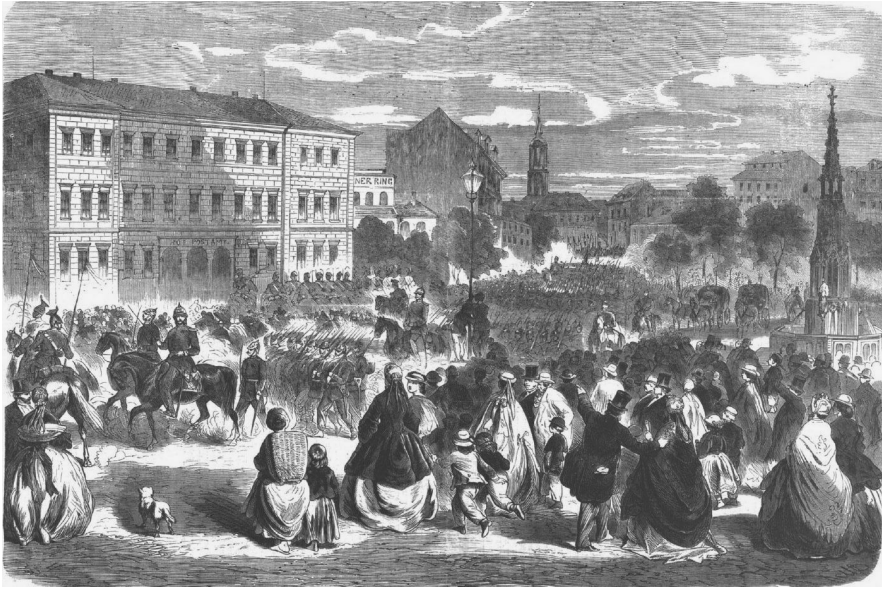
<sup>31</sup> Stolberg-Wernigerode, "Bismarckgespräch."

<sup>32</sup> Beust (1861) in Böhme, *Foundation*, 96f.; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Josef von Werner (Dresden), to Austrian FO, 2.5.66, in Srbik, *Quellen*, 5:566f.

<sup>33</sup> Flöter, *Beust*, 466f.; Neemann, *Landtag*, 430–87.

<sup>34</sup> See "Bismarck's Diplomatic and Military Gamble through British Eyes (February–August 1866)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1815](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1815).

<sup>35</sup> For details and further references, Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 4. Earlier treatments with different emphases include Retallack, "Why Can't a Saxon"; idem, "To My Loyal Saxons!"



**Figure 1.2.** Prussian Troops Enter Dresden, 18 June 1866. After a sketch by August Reinhardt. The same scene was painted by Carl von Behrenberg and is found in Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, 113.

Source: *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig) 47, Nr. 1202 (14 July 1866), 24.

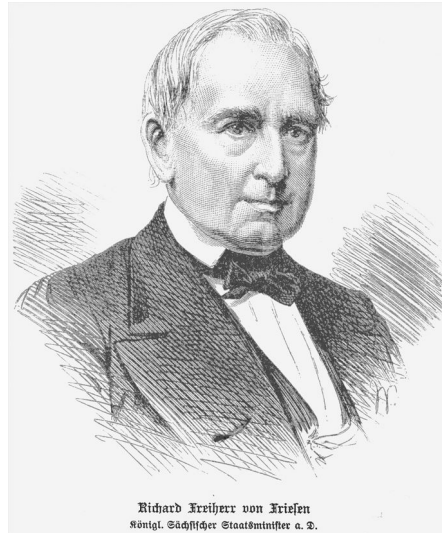
integrity (although the question lay in doubt for three more months). And the final peace treaty between Prussia and Saxony, signed on 21 October, allowed King Johann to return from temporary exile and reclaim the Saxon throne.<sup>36</sup> Saxony was forced to enter the North German Confederation under Prussia domination, pay an indemnity of ten million Thaler, and amalgamate its military with the new federal army under Prussian command. These peace terms were considered lenient. They augured well for Germany's progress toward unity.

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After Königgrätz, Beust's idea of leading a Third Germany was a dead letter. On 16 August 1866 the Saxon king reluctantly accepted Beust's resignation. Beust's successor, Baron Richard von Friesen, was able quickly to turn the page and steer Saxony into safer waters.

The compactness of Saxony's state ministry helped. It comprised just six portfolios: the interior and foreign ministries and those for justice, culture, finance, and war. After 1866 the workload of the foreign minister was significantly reduced, so this portfolio was always held jointly with one of the other five (usually the interior

<sup>36</sup> *GVBl* 1866, No. 199, 211–21; Huber, *Dokumente*, 2:262–4.



**Figure 1.3.** Richard von Friesen, Saxon Minister of the Interior 1849–52, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1866–76, Minister of Finance 1858–76, and chair of the *Gesamtministerium* 1871–76.

Source: Richard Freiherr von Friesen, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, 3 vols. (Dresden, 1880–1910), vol. 3 (frontispiece).

ministry). The *de jure* chair of the ministry was always the minister with the most years of service: in theory he was just *primus inter pares*. This unusual arrangement prevailed until 1918. But *de facto* Saxony's state ministry was usually led by another minister, who we can call the government leader. He really called the tune.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the period 1866–76, Richard von Friesen (Figure 1.3) held both the finance and foreign ministries. Only two other ministers were politically important. Minister of war (1866–91) was Alfred von Fabrice, a conservative general. He still held this post (also the foreign ministry after 1882) when he died in 1891. Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz was only forty years old when he was appointed minister of the interior (1866–91). Nostitz's relative youth may have helped him weather the political storms he encountered as sponsor of the Saxon suffrage law of 1868, the reform of local government in 1873/74, and implementation of the Anti-Socialist Law from 1878 to 1890.

If we consider the political outlook of these men collectively, we find a strong preference for continuity. This preference accords with what we know about the evolution of the Saxon state between 1860 and 1918. When he came to the throne in 1873, King Albert retained intact the cabinet that had served his father Johann;

<sup>37</sup> I have used "government leader" for "*Vorsitzender des Gesamtministeriums*." Blaschke, "Königreich Sachsen," 94–8; Blaschke, "Verwaltung"; Schmidt, "Zentralverwaltung," 113–18; Klein, *Grundriß*, 103–16. Kötzschke/Kretzschmar, *Geschichte*, pt. 9; "Sachsen und seine Ministerpräsidenten," pts. 5–9; Friesen, *Erinnerungen*; Dittrich, *Fabrice*.

Albert's two successors in 1902 and 1904 did the same, wishing to minimize the disruptive impact of the royal succession. Because Saxon ministers typically came to office at a relatively advanced age—a high proportion of them died in office—they tended to be firmly set in their political convictions and uninterested in striking out in new political directions. Most ministers were nobles or ennobled in office; but a strong bourgeois element was always present in Saxony's civil service. State ministers grew more dependent over time on the next lower level of officials—the ministerial directors and privy counselors who were increasingly drawn from bourgeois circles. In short, bourgeois codes of conduct and political conservatism were eminently compatible, as noted in the memoirs of Walter Koch, Saxony's last interior minister before the November 1918 revolution: "The watchwords of the upper administrative officials in Saxony were constancy and tradition. For generations their forebears had been either higher civil servants or even ministers. They were thoroughly upright, educated, mostly also very clever people, but difficult to move, highly conservative, and disinclined to embrace the trends of the day. With respect to the great movements of the age, they regarded themselves not as the gearbox but as the brake."<sup>38</sup>

Upon signing of the peace treaty between Prussia and Saxony on 21 October 1866, foreign observers were virtually unanimous that Saxony had retained only the appearance of a sovereign state. The US ambassador in Berlin reported that Prussia would compel the Saxon army corps to swear the usual military oath of allegiance to the king of Prussia, would take possession of all military forts, and would disband all regiments that had fought under Austrian colors at Königgrätz. "Saxony may be ruled for a few years" by King Johann "as a temporary Governor without authority or power," but this anomalous situation would soon pass and "the ancient Saxon will become a part of the Prussian Empire." A few days after the peace treaty was signed, he reported that "the Nationality and Sovereignty [*sic*] of Saxony in the future exist only in name."<sup>39</sup>

What did the Saxon people think about this? Did they believe Saxon sovereignty had been gambled and lost in war? The acrimonious mood generated by the Reichstag election campaign of 1866/67 reflected the inner turmoil of Saxons. Faced with clear but uncomfortable choices between pro- and anti-Prussian Reichstag candidates, Saxons were being asked to decide how local, regional, and national allegiances could be reconciled. As one diplomat reported from Dresden, "the drawn-out military occupation, the dissolution of the [Saxon army], the subordination under the victorious Prussians, the incorporation into a political system that has achieved the unification of Germany in a way that is contrary to the traditions of Saxon particularism, that burdens the population, and that offends the interests and habits of the individual—all this was, and is, a necessity with which

<sup>38</sup> SHStAD, NL Walter Koch, Bd. 1, 160–7.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph A. Wright (Berlin), 3.9.66, 1.11.66, NARA, 59, M44, reel 13. Cf. British envoy to Saxony, Charles Eden (Dresden), to British FO, 20/26.10.66, PRO, FO 68/142; British consul Joseph Archer Crowe (Leipzig), to British FO, 5.11.66, PRO, FO 68/144.

one is able to come to terms [in Saxony] only through painful resignation.”<sup>40</sup> Another diplomat agreed: the popular mood in Saxony had never been so sour.<sup>41</sup>

## ELECTORAL POLITICS IN THE OLD KEY

In Saxony we have no reason to welcome any kind of change. We are a very well-governed people . . . It is true that we look to the north in many respects, in industry, religion, in the similar nature of our people's character, but therefore we still do not want to merge with Prussia. We want to keep our king, our sovereignty, and our constitution.

—Karl von Weber, secretary to Saxony's Provisional Government,  
24 June 1866<sup>42</sup>

Parties must ever exist in a free country.

—Edmund Burke, 1775<sup>43</sup>

In late 1867 the Prussian envoy in Dresden reported that “political life, which everyone concedes did not exist at all here before, has come alive with Saxony's entry into the North German Confederation.”<sup>44</sup> Before the tumultuous events of 1866, each of the four main political groupings in Saxony regarded party politics in a mainly negative light.<sup>45</sup> Those negative orientations changed with a suddenness that astounded contemporaries. By the end of the year each political movement had taken on a more distinct profile—recruiting supporters, building a party apparatus, and focusing on winning elections. This revitalization of the public sphere set the mold of Saxony's electoral culture for the next six decades.

## CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

Prussian conservatives developed a distinctive ideology in the first half of the nineteenth century, and their network of local associations and newspapers helped them withstand the revolutionary challenge of 1848.<sup>46</sup> Led by the editor of the *Neue Preussische (Kreuz-) Zeitung*, Hermann Wagener, they also tried to establish a grass-roots following through the Prussian People's Association in the early 1860s. Wagener and his Prussian colleagues concocted a potent brew of anti-liberalism and

<sup>40</sup> Prussian envoy to Saxony, Friedrich von Eichmann (Dresden), to Prussian FO, 12.3.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39, Bd. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Max von Gise (Dresden), to Bavarian FO, 18.1.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841.

<sup>42</sup> Diary entry cited in Kretzschmar, *Zeit*, 63f.

<sup>43</sup> Burke, *On Conciliation with America* (1775).

<sup>44</sup> Eichmann, 18.12.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39, Bd. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Neemann, *Landtag*, 456–87.

<sup>46</sup> Berdahl, *Politics*; Schwentker, *Vereine*; Füßl, *Professor*; Ritter, *Konservativen*; Jones/Retallack, *Reform*; Stegmann et al., *Konservatismus*; recent overviews in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 1; Kraus, *Bismarck*; Ruetz, *Konservativen*; Reif, “Bismarck.”

antisemitism to mobilize new recruits.<sup>47</sup> In Saxony, by contrast, neither a conservative party nor a conservative “movement” existed before Königgrätz.<sup>48</sup> Conservatives were not compelled to undertake grass-roots political organization because their candidates were favored at election time by local officials, state censors, and veterans’ associations. Their opponents, conversely, were hampered by Beust’s famous “black book,” which listed persons of suspected oppositional tendencies, and by the government’s use of its right to annul the election of liberals to local city councils. These advantages seemed to render a conservative party organization superfluous. Instead the conservative “idea” was borne loosely by four overlapping groups in Saxony: the aristocracy, the officer class, members of the royal court, and the civil service. Most members of these groups would have agreed with a contributor to the conservative *Budissiner Nachrichten* in 1865: “Harmony reigns between king and people. Everywhere in the land we have prosperity, low taxes, and good finances. Higher state- and cultural pursuits are not neglected by us, nor are the interests of the larger Fatherland. All fantasies entertained by the large states cannot disturb our well being, for there is room enough in the smallest hut for a satisfied heart.”<sup>49</sup> This wishful thinking was dissipated by the Prussian invasion of June 1866. Suddenly Saxon conservatives were forced to express their political convictions in unfamiliar venues: in public assemblies, in an expanding press landscape, in political clubs, in municipal council chambers. Their preference for quieter times generally fell on deaf ears. But conservatives could take heart in the knowledge that whatever challenges and discomforts the new order might bring, those challenges were also being experienced by their liberal opponents.

Political cleavages that afflicted the liberal movements in Prussia and other German states also ran through the heart of Saxon liberalism. Even before the 1848 Revolution, a distinction was apparent between “radicals” (or “democrats”) and “moderates” (or “liberals”) within the movement. This distinction was embodied in the careers of Robert Blum, who was executed for his revolutionary activity in November 1848, and Karl Biedermann, who was temporarily banished but returned in 1863 to lead Saxon National Liberals for another generation. By 1866, Saxon liberalism drew its main strength from the middle- and upper-middle classes: lawyers, factory owners, journalists, professors and other teachers, and merchants and businessmen (both generally described by the term *Kaufmann*).<sup>50</sup> There were also significant geographical variations in liberal support. The industrial areas around Chemnitz, Plauen, and Glauchau provided lower-middle-class recruits. Leipzig, Zittau, and Borna, together with their surrounding areas, provided the liberal parties with more prominent members from trading, commercial, and academic circles,

<sup>47</sup> Albrecht, *Antiliberalismus*; also Saile, *Wagener*; Hornung, “Konservatismus”; Grünthal, “Wahlkampf-führung.”

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Francis Reginald Forbes, 4.10.49, BETG, 3:295; Heinrich von Friesen-Rammelburg to Ludwig von Gerlach, 6.3.51, cited in Kraus, *Gerlach*, 2:693f.; Johann Georg, *Briefwechsel... mit Ticknor*, 27–52; Hohenthal-Püchau, *Partei*; Neemann, *Landtag*, 60.

<sup>49</sup> BN, 11./15.6.65, cited in Jordan, *Meinung*, 14–15.

<sup>50</sup> Björnsson, “Man”; Boettcher, *Stephani*, chs. 2–4. See also Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:208–14; Jansen, *Einheit*, 204–10; Jansen, “Linke”; Jansen, “Forty-eighters”; Holldack, *Untersuchungen*, 129ff.

as did municipal administrators such as Otto Koch (Biedermann's father-in-law) and Eduard Stephani, respectively the lord mayor and deputy mayor of Leipzig.<sup>51</sup>

Agreement between left-leaning Progressives and right-leaning National Liberals was possible on many fronts. They often allied for municipal elections and in the Saxon Landtag. And they both developed connections to other opposition groups. Among the latter we find workers, whom liberals tried to attract through Workers' Education Societies and social welfare organizations; religious "free thinkers," who were also repressed by the Beust system; and members of voluntary associations (mainly in Leipzig) who sought to address the needs and expand the rights of women.<sup>52</sup> Beust regarded all these "friends of democracy" as "enemies of the government": their politics were as suspect as their social origins.<sup>53</sup>

A Progressive Association in Saxony was founded at a small, closed meeting of about fifty to eighty delegates held in Leipzig on 25 April 1863. It was intended to augment (and in some ways rival) the work of the National Association and the German Progressive Party, which had been founded in 1861.<sup>54</sup> The members of the Saxon Progressive Association adopted five goals, each of which revealed the importance of elections in re-awakening Saxon political life. They sought to counter the imminent establishment of a local conservative association in Leipzig; to bring new blood to a liberal movement suffering from political "lethargy"; to find new leaders and activists to supplement an aging cadre of "Old '48ers"; to press the Saxon government for fundamental reform of the Landtag suffrage; and to decide whether to acknowledge the government's coup d'état of June 1850.

Liberal outrage against the Beust regime was not a pedantic exercise in wishful thinking or a hopeless campaign for abstract ideals. It drew strength from personal and professional calamities that afflicted thousands of Saxon families for decades after the rebellions of 1848–49: exile, prison, even death sentences. Arnold Ruge, a veteran of the Dresden Uprising, wrote from his English exile about the climate of hatred and suspicion that prevailed into the 1860s: "I am still being dogged by Johann Nepomuck von Sachsen and his Beust. . . The Saxons are driven mad by the need for legitimacy and vengeance."<sup>55</sup> Hence it would be an understatement to say that the failed Revolution of 1848 and the bloody suppression of the Dresden Uprising in 1849 still rankled among Saxon Progressives in the 1860s. They believed that open questions about the legitimacy

<sup>51</sup> Boettcher, *Stephani*; Vogel, "Bewegung"; Björnsson, "Liberalism"; Björnsson, "Man," 89ff.; Thümmeler, "Zusammensetzung"; Thümmeler, "Landtag"; Dittrich, "Herkunft"; Schröder, "Unternehmer"; Bazillion, "Liberalism."

<sup>52</sup> Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:210–14; Biedermann, *Vorlesungen*; Zwahr, *Konstituierung*, 240–7, 295–311; Kolbe, "Opposition"; Findel, *Deutschkatholizismus*. On women, Schötz, *Frauenalltag*; Schötz, *Handelsfrauen*; Schubert, "Lage," 119–22.

<sup>53</sup> Police report (1860) in Holldack, *Untersuchungen*, 129f.; British envoy to Saxony, Charles A. Murray, to British FO, 20.2.62, PRO, FO 68/122.

<sup>54</sup> *Gb* 22, 1. Sem., Bd. 2 (1863): 193–9; *MFVKS* 1, nos. 17/18 (6./20.7.11); Wybranietz, "Beiträge," 159ff.; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:209ff.; *CZ*, 18.9.63, in Fuchs, "Wigard," 2:160f.; Seeber, "Fortschrittsparlei"; Biefang, "National-preußisch."

<sup>55</sup> Letter of 9.5.61 in Jansen, *Revolution*, 750.

of their own Landtag demanded every bit as much political courage as did the constitutional conflict in Prussia.

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In 1866 three liberal nationalists became lightning-rods for political controversy: Karl Biedermann, Heinrich von Treitschke, and Gustav Freytag.<sup>56</sup> Biedermann is the least well known of this trio. His birth was touched by mystery and a whiff of irony. Hints from contemporaries suggest that Biedermann's half-brother may have been none other than his political arch-rival Friedrich von Beust.<sup>57</sup> Beust was behind the 1853 intrigue that cost Biedermann his professorship in Leipzig, which was not reinstated until 1865. After his return to Saxony Biedermann served as chief editor of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. Published in Leipzig, it enjoyed a national reputation. Heinrich von Treitschke's writings attracted more attention from contemporaries and historians alike. His family origins, too, were noteworthy, resembling what Freytag called a "curious turn of destiny."<sup>58</sup> Treitschke's father was a Saxon general who served in the wars against Napoleon and rose far enough to add a "von" before his name. During the 1860s, the younger Treitschke honed his invective against the "stifling" and "servile" Saxon state.<sup>59</sup> Like these other two, Freytag preached the "Prussian gospel."<sup>60</sup> For him, anything provincial, particularist, or parochial was a target, as it was for Treitschke. However, Freytag never shared Treitschke's determination to chart Prussia's rise as a universal good for all of Germany: he felt more comfortable in his Leipzig skin. From 1848 onwards he co-edited *Die Grenzboten* from Leipzig. As his journal's title suggested, he hoped to carry the liberal message from Leipzig across Saxony's borders—ideally in both directions. Freytag's writing contained none of the spleen so typical of Treitschke, whose description of Beust as a "pompous eunuch" counts as one of his milder polemics.<sup>61</sup>

After 1859, Leipzig belonged to a web of liberal networks that extended beyond Saxony's borders to other parts of the Reich.<sup>62</sup> And in Leipzig the nexus of this web was the Kitzing & Helbing Tavern on the Grimmaische Strasse, one of Leipzig's oldest watering holes. There, around a *Stammtisch*<sup>63</sup> in one corner of the banquet room, a small group of Leipzigers met every Tuesday and Friday evening from 7 to 8 p.m. to raise a glass, share the day's events—and plan Germany's future. They unabashedly called themselves "The Conspiracy." More than a salon and less than a

<sup>56</sup> The following draws on Bazillion, *Germany*; Dorpalen, *Treitschke*; Langer, *Treitschke*; Herrmann, "Freytag"; Ping, "Freytag"; Laaths, "Nationalliberalismus"; Boettcher, *Stephani*; Müller, "Wirken"; Müller, "Biedermann"; Schulze, "Biedermann"; Björnsson, "Man"; Jansen, *Einheit*; Heyderhoff/Wentzcke, *Liberalismus*; Jansen, *Revolution*; Rosenberg, *Publizistik*; Faber, *Publizistik*.

<sup>57</sup> Bazillion, *Germany*, 68f.; Björnsson, "Man," 100ff.; Haunfelder, *Abgeordneten*, 70.

<sup>58</sup> Freytag in Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 188; for the following, *ibid.*, 1–8, 118–21; Kretzschmar, "Verhältnis"; Treitschke, *Briefe*, 3:11–71.

<sup>59</sup> See Treitschke to Max Duncker, 19.8.59, Treitschke, *Briefe*, 2:42–7; cf. Treitschke, *Zukunft*.

<sup>60</sup> Freytag, *Erinnerungen*, 307; Ping, "Freytag," 406.

<sup>61</sup> Björnsson, "Man," esp. ch. 2; Treitschke to Freytag, 28.1.66, Treitschke, *Briefe*, 2:458; Langer, *Treitschke*, 114, 120; cf. Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:289.

<sup>62</sup> Eckardt, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:107–15.

<sup>63</sup> "Table for regulars."



party, this group came to be known as simply “the Kitzing.”<sup>64</sup> To belong to the Kitzing was a liberal “*profession de foi*.”<sup>65</sup> Other members included Karl Mathy, who later served as minister president in the Grand Duchy of Baden; another editor of the *Grenzboten*, Moritz Busch, better known as Bismarck’s amanuensis; Leipzig’s deputy mayor Eduard Stephani; Dr. Max Jordan, first director of the National Gallery in Berlin; and the publishing Brockhaus brothers, Heinrich and Friedrich. A frequent guest of these “conspirators” was Joseph Archer Crowe, Britain’s consul general in Leipzig.<sup>66</sup> “All were good comrades,” wrote Busch, “united in the harmony of their convictions about what alone could benefit the nation.”<sup>67</sup> In the spring of 1866, Biedermann, Freytag, and other liberal nationalists in Saxony offered a more strident defense of Prussia with each passing week.<sup>68</sup> They were not above conjuring up the red menace. Biedermann’s *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* noted that an unsuccessful war would enhance the political fortunes of socialism. Another liberal organ, the *Constitutionelle Zeitung*, reported the half-truth that many wealthy families were leaving Dresden because of socialist rhetoric directed against private property.<sup>69</sup>

In July 1866 Biedermann led the liberal nationalists’ first steps toward organizing a new political party. Saxon authorities did their best to ensure the new party would never see the light of day, but the Prussians’ military and civilian commissars in occupied Saxony ensured that National Liberal views got a hearing. The conflict between Prussian and Saxon authorities was so intense that a congress of Saxon liberal nationalists, finally held in Leipzig on 26 August, took place in an atmosphere of mutual recrimination and rhetorical excess.<sup>70</sup>

The ground for that meeting was also prepared by Treitschke and Freytag. Besides his monthly reviews in the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, which were “rat poison” to Saxony’s particularists, Treitschke penned a brochure entitled *The Future of the North-German Middle States*.<sup>71</sup> Dated 30 July 1866, this polemic had a bombshell effect when it hit the bookshops barely a week later.<sup>72</sup> Referring to Hanover, Electoral Hessen, and Saxony, Treitschke wrote apodictically that “these three dynasties are ripe, over-ripe, for well-deserved extermination.” “Their restitution,” he continued, “would be a danger for the security of the new German federation, a sin against the morality of the nation.” Coining a phrase that historians still use to describe the events of 1864–71, Treitschke argued that history had shown that

<sup>64</sup> Schulze, “Kitzing”; Herrmann, “Freytag,” 181–98; Freytag, *Erinnerungen*, 336–8; Naujoks, “*Grenzboten*.”

<sup>65</sup> Eckardt, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:51.

<sup>66</sup> Crowe, *Reminiscences*, esp. 383–6, 395–7; Murray, *Diplomacy*, 42, 104–6; Freytag, *Erinnerungen*, 337f.

<sup>67</sup> Busch, “Kriegswochen,” in idem, *Tagebuchblätter*, 3:368; cf. Blum, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:258f.

<sup>68</sup> Zeise, “Rolle,” 267–8; Jordan, *Meinung*, 134–73; Rosenberg, *Publizistik*, 2:942–73; *Prjbb* 17 (1866): 670–6.

<sup>69</sup> Jordan, *Meinung*, 139–45, 172–7, 193–202; Faber, *Publizistik*, 2:94–103; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:277–86; Björnsson, “Men,” 142; *CZ*, 9.8.66, in Brandt, “Stellung,” 12.

<sup>70</sup> Kirchner, “Landesversammlung”; Jordan, *Meinung*, 181–8; Biedermann, *Fünfzig Jahre*, 121–6; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:286–9; Boettcher, *Stephani*, 79–81.

<sup>71</sup> Treitschke, *Zukunft*, rpt. in Treitschke, *Aufsätze*, 3:289–311; cf. Treitschke, *Briefe*, 3:16–36.

<sup>72</sup> Busch, “Kriegswochen,” 544f. (8.8.66); cf. Wyrwa, “Treitschke,” 783f.

“the German revolution” would come “from above.” “The removal of these smaller crowns” of central Europe was not only a legitimate consequence of Prussia’s victory on the field of battle; it was “an act of historical necessity.” Treitschke warned Saxon liberals that they faced a long struggle if “the weed of subservience and denunciation” were not once again, as in the Beust era, to reduce Saxon public life to “a state of political immaturity.”<sup>73</sup>

Just days later the *Grenzboten* published an essay by Freytag on “The Future of the Kingdom of Saxony.”<sup>74</sup> How, Freytag asked, could a prince return to his land and lead it into federal union with a rival state he had just fought on the field of battle? The answer was found in a pamphlet he published anonymously on 6 September: *What is to Become of Saxony?*<sup>75</sup> Freytag intentionally reverted to the “bellowing style” of 1848, but he also struck every register of liberal nationalist propaganda in the coming election campaign. He extolled the benefits of the German Customs Union, he attacked the spirit of small-state parochialism, he claimed that Beust’s coup d’état of 1850 had broken a bond of trust, he called on Saxon diplomacy to abandon its practice of looking to Vienna or Paris, and he endorsed Treitschke’s call for the House of Wettin to renounce the Saxon throne. The conservative backlash against these polemics was stinging. The pages of the conservative *Leipziger Zeitung* were soon filled with testimonials from conservative schoolteachers outraged that the civil service and the monarchy should be drawn into party-political wrangles. Liberal nationalists were condemned for their “satanic” call to treason against the Saxon king.<sup>76</sup>

The liberal nationalists’ first state-wide congress was held in Leipzig’s Hotel de Pologne on 26 August. The meeting itself, attended by between 300 and 350 people, was tumultuous, not least because it included democratic and conservative interlopers.<sup>77</sup> Reports differ as to whether Biedermann actually lost control of the meeting or simply allowed radical annexationists to use words he dared not utter himself. Either way, the hotspur chair of the Leipzig municipal parliament, Hermann Joseph, found approval for a resolution that called on the Saxon king to undertake “the greatest act of the century” by renouncing his throne. Joseph added Biedermann’s name, without his consent, to this resolution and promptly dispatched it in telegrams to Treitschke and other friends in Prussia.

Quite a different reflection of Saxon public opinion was found in the reports Bismarck received from his civil commissar stationed in Dresden to oversee the Prussian occupation. Lothar von Wurmb repeatedly urged Bismarck to demand harsh terms from the Saxons. Wurmb’s assessment was dramatic. “It could be that King Johann and the crown prince, after their recent experiences with Austria,

<sup>73</sup> Treitschke, *Zukunft*, 13, 26–7.

<sup>74</sup> *Gb* 25, 2. Sem., Bd. 3 (1866): 241–8; cf. Freytag, “Der Friede von 1866,” in Freytag, *Bilder... Entstehung*, 367–89; Freytag, *Politische Aufsätze*, 265–329; Jekosch, “Haltung,” 195–203; Faber, *Publizistik*, 1:29, 33f., 94, 143f., 165–7.

<sup>75</sup> [Freytag], *Was wird aus Sachsen?*; Freytag to Stosch, 8.9.66; Freytag to Treitschke, 9.9.66; in Sprengel, “Liberalismus,” 157, and Freytag to Salomon Hirzel, 9.9.66, *Freytags Briefe an Hirzel*, 2:43n127; Faber, *Publizistik*, 1:96f.

<sup>76</sup> *DN*, 14.9.66, cited in Jordan, *Meinung*, 193f.

<sup>77</sup> Jordan, *Meinung*, 181–9.

actually want and will strive toward an honorable and genuine co-operation with Prussia . . . However, for all the other numerous officials in the Saxon civil service, from the regional governor down to the assistant gendarme, one finds not a trace of sympathy, but rather only fundamental, deep hatred of Prussia. As soon as these officials have power once again in their hands, neither the king nor his state ministry will be able to prevent the mistreatment of Prussians living in Saxony." Wurmb's conclusion was clear: "Saxony will enter the North German Confederation only to the degree that it is forced to do so and will take up its role there only in order to make Prussia's task more difficult and to diminish its power."

Despite the protection offered them under the general amnesty of 21 October which was part of the peace agreement between Prussia and Saxony, each of our liberal nationalist protagonists had to accept the consequences of his pro-Prussian, anti-Saxon stance in the summer of 1866. Treitschke's brochure caused immense pain to his father, who felt compelled to publish a public disavowal of his son.<sup>78</sup> On the very day of King Johann's triumphal reentry into Dresden (3 November), Treitschke wrote that no one would shed a tear when the Saxon king drew his last breath.<sup>79</sup> Before the end of September 1866, Freytag admitted that "General" Bismarck and his ministers in Berlin had been "more clear-sighted than us" in "their appraisal of the absolute squalidness of the middle states."<sup>80</sup> In 1867 Biedermann traveled by train with some young friends to a small town not far from Leipzig. "As we sat talking harmlessly in a public garden," Biedermann recalled later, "a stranger strolled inconspicuously past my chair and whispered: 'It's good that you have protection, Herr Professor; otherwise it would not be healthy for you here!'"<sup>81</sup>

#### BEBEL, LIEBKNECHT, AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

If the liberal nationalists had met in Glauchau on 19 August 1866 instead of in Leipzig one week later, they would have convened in the same corner of Saxony and on the same day that August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht founded the Saxon People's Party.<sup>82</sup> Some observers believed that the events of July–August 1866 were polarizing the forces of revolution and reaction in Germany. Many years later, in 1906, the editor of the *Antisozialdemokratische Correspondenz*, Max Lorenz, proclaimed the start of something new in 1866. "That the establishment of the unitary state in Germany, the beginnings of the workers' movement, and the awarding of the general and equal suffrage effectively occurred at the same time—this is the truly fateful moment in modern German history, and herein lies the real source of Social Democratic growth."<sup>83</sup> The historical congruity Lorenz perceived

<sup>78</sup> Treitschke, *Briefe*, 3:39–71 and 3:149 for Treitschke to his wife, 13.3.67.

<sup>79</sup> Treitschke to Freytag, 3.11.66, Treitschke, *Briefe*, 3:103–5.

<sup>80</sup> Freytag to Heinrich Geffcken, 27.9.66, in Hinrichs, "Briefe," 101; Freytag to Julian Schmidt, late Sept. 1866, in Naujoks, "Grenzboten," 161; cf. Freytag, *Erinnerungen*, 328.

<sup>81</sup> Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:289.

<sup>82</sup> Abbreviated SVP. See "Saxon People's Party, Founding Program (19 August 1866)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=687](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=687).

<sup>83</sup> Max Lorenz in *SPN* 3, no. 17 (26.5.06): 2.

retrospectively was less apparent at the time. The Saxon People's Party provided the kernel of an anti-Bismarckian, anti-Prussian, democratic people's movement, but it did not immediately extinguish opportunities for cooperation between socialist and Progressive leaders on both a national and an international basis.

Three years earlier, workers' representatives in Leipzig had invited Ferdinand Lassalle to express his views on the labor movement in an "open letter" to their committee, which he did in February 1863. This led to the founding of the General German Workers' Association (ADAV) in Leipzig in May 1863.<sup>84</sup> Under the leadership of Lassalle and, after his death in August 1864, that of Johann Baptiste Schweitzer, the ADAV developed into a fiercely independent workers' organization. The quasi-dictatorial leadership style of Lassalle and Schweitzer did not suit Bebel and Liebknecht. Bebel preferred to work through the Workers' Education Societies and the workers' associations in and around Leipzig. In the first half of the decade these had "sprouted from the ground like mushrooms after a warm summer rain." By mid-1865, a loose network of twenty-nine Saxon workers' associations represented 4,579 members. Bebel's influence was dominant here and in the Union of German Workers' Associations (VDAV), a rival to the ADAV.

The son of a Prussian non-commissioned officer, August Bebel had settled in Leipzig in 1860 as an apprentice turner. He was just twenty years old. Soon he had established his own small workshop at Petersstrasse 18—just down the street from the Kitzing. Bebel specialized in producing door and window handles made of buffalo horns.<sup>85</sup> It was never easy for him to continue to pursue this trade as he rose to prominence as chairman (1865) of Leipzig's Workers' Education Society, as president of the VDAV, as a deputy in the Reichstag and Saxon Landtag, during nearly five years in prison, and when he was expelled from Leipzig under the Anti-Socialist Law. The publication of *Woman under Socialism* (1879), probably German Social Democracy's most important tract and one of the nineteenth century's best-sellers, allowed him to live mainly from his writing. But more important in securing Bebel's national reputation were his speaking ability in parliament, his talent for mediating among contending factions and personalities within the Social Democratic movement, and his determination to preserve the integrity of the movement in the 1880s.<sup>86</sup> By 1890 Bebel was the uncontested leader—Lenin and others called him the *embodiment*—of Germany's Social Democratic movement.<sup>87</sup> He served as co-chairman of the renamed Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) from 1892 until his death in 1913.

Under Bebel's stewardship, the VDAV had developed its own momentum by mid-1865. Then, as Bebel wrote, "Liebknecht came to us as a godsend."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> See list of abbreviations for full German names of these associations.

<sup>85</sup> See BAmL, 177–81; Welskopp, "Berufspolitiker," 195–201. Currently, the best English-language biography of Bebel is Machl, *Bebel*.

<sup>86</sup> Lidtke, *Party*.

<sup>87</sup> "August Bebel," in V. I. Lenin, *Werke*, cited in BARuS, 1:i.

<sup>88</sup> BAmL, 64, 128. For the preceding, see Schweitzer, *Aufsätze*; Offermann, *Arbeiterbewegung*; Offermann, *Arbeiterpartei*; Offermann, "Ausbreitung"; Welskopp, *Banner*; Na'aman, *Konstituierung*.

Wilhelm Liebknecht was Bebel's elder by fourteen years and had had a more privileged upbringing. He joined revolutionary fighting in Baden in 1848, for which he served nine months in prison. He then spent the years 1850–62 in England, where he came to know Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels well. Like Bebel, Liebknecht barely eked out a living, mainly as editor of leading Social Democratic newspapers and journals. Bebel wrote once that Liebknecht was forced to sell "many a good book" to second-hand bookshops to put food on the table. The two also shared prison terms for treason, expulsion from Leipzig, and parliamentary service in the Reichstag (from August 1867) and the Saxon Landtag (from 1879). Liebknecht was initially Bebel's political mentor, introducing him to Marx's teachings; but he lacked Bebel's tactical savvy. Both men nevertheless achieved unparalleled standing within the movement by combining "legitimation through poverty" with great political acumen. As Liebknecht observed from the prisoners' dock during his Leipzig trial for treason in March 1872, "I am not the depraved adventurer that my denouncers want to turn me into . . . I am *not* a conspirator by profession . . . Call me, if you will, a soldier of the revolution—I have nothing against that."<sup>89</sup>

If Bebel and Liebknecht needed the help of Saxon Progressives to get the Saxon People's Party off the ground, pro-Austrian (*großdeutsch*) democrats also needed their organizational and propaganda talents. The Union of German Workers' Associations was not a political party, but it allied closely with the German People's Party, which had its center of gravity in southwest Germany. Bebel and Liebknecht were more insistent on giving voice to workers' social demands than were their left-liberal colleagues. But until 1869, and beyond, they had to tread carefully. They could not "intone socialist principles as a war-cry [but instead had to] treat them as a means of educating the people."<sup>90</sup> As Liebknecht wrote while he was campaigning for the Reichstag in August 1867: "With propaganda on purely social lines . . . we would play into the hands of the common enemy of all honest German democrats, socialists, and patriots, namely Prussian caesarism. That must not happen at any price."<sup>91</sup> Bebel and Liebknecht did not share Lassalle's "fetish" that universal suffrage was a cure-all for working-class misery. Nevertheless, the first and second "demands of democracy" found in the Chemnitz program of the Saxon People's Party gave priority to voting rights and the German question.<sup>92</sup>

One of the most remarkable aspects of Social Democracy's consolidation in 1866–7 is the degree to which particularism spanned the political divide between the democratic Left in Saxony and the far Right. These Saxon "patriots" were not such strange bedfellows, but an attitude of *laissez-aller* between Liebknecht and Bebel on the one hand, and Saxon civil servants on the other, occasionally took on

Mayer, "Arbeiterverein"; Offermann, "Bebel," 314f.; Birker, *Arbeiterbildungsvereine*; Fischer, *Bebel; Leidigkeit, Liebknecht*; Dominick, *Liebknecht*; Schröder, "Liebknecht."

<sup>89</sup> Welskopp, "Berufspolitiker," 215.

<sup>90</sup> Cited in Weber, *Demokraten*, 253.

<sup>91</sup> Liebknecht to Johann Philipp Becker, 8.8.67, cited in Morgan, *Social Democrats*, 125.

<sup>92</sup> BAmL, 163f.; Böhme, *Foundation*, 175f.; cf. Benser, *Herausbildung*, 97–9; Goodrum, "Socialists," 299f.; Rudolph, "Disappearance," 213.

farcical proportions. When Liebknecht was banished from Prussia in July 1865, he wrote that he and his family were welcomed in Leipzig by the Saxon police in a “*most friendly manner* as the ‘enemy of Bismarck.’” In his memoirs Bebel recalled other occasions when political cooperation with Saxon conservatives made perfect sense. In May 1867, after his maiden speech in the Constituent North German Reichstag, two aristocratic-looking men showed up at Bebel’s workshop while he was sawing buffalo horns at his workbench. One of them looked him over from head to toe and introduced himself as the president of Saxony’s upper chamber, Baron Friedrich von Friesen. He commended Bebel for his Reichstag speech and then politely took his leave. More revealing still is a conversation held in the small locale opposite the Reichstag’s temporary quarters in Berlin where Saxon deputies arranged to have lunch served to them while parliament was in session. One day Bebel was talking to Ludwig Haberkorn, a Conservative deputy who was also mayor of Zittau and president of the Saxon lower house. Haberkorn had been upset by Bismarck’s speech in the Reichstag that morning, but the depth of his anger surprised Bebel: “Our [Saxon] particularists at that time were driven by an unbounded hatred of Bismarck . . . They would have made a pact with the devil to be rid of him.”<sup>93</sup>

### “NEW IDEAS ARE FILLING THE WORLD”

Gentlemen! Let us work quickly! Put Germany, as it were, in the saddle! It will certainly be able to ride.

—Otto von Bismarck in the Constituent North German Reichstag,  
11 March 1867<sup>94</sup>

We enjoyed . . . his slyness. He mastered the art of walking backward into the future. He would say “After me.” And some people went ahead, and some went behind, and he would go backward.

—of Mikhail Gorbachev, 1994<sup>95</sup>

On 1 January 1866, a contributor to the democratic *Neue Frankfurter Zeitung* wrote that “the present age bears a remarkable similarity to the period immediately before the discovery of America. New ideas are filling the world.”<sup>96</sup> Years later a co-editor of the *Grenzboten* recalled, “Never in my life did I breathe fresher, more invigorating air than that which blew across the north of Germany in the late fall of 1866 . . . We stood on the threshold of a new era, of a time ‘that still promised miracles.’”<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> BAmL, 348–53; BARuS, 1:14–17.

<sup>94</sup> *Sienographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags des Norddeutschen Bundes*, 1:135–9, at 139; “Bismarck’s Speech in the North German Reichstag in Defense of his Draft Constitution (11 March 1867),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1825](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1825).

<sup>95</sup> Attributed to the Russian writer Mikhail Zhvanetsky.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Steinbach, *Zähmung*, 1:93.

<sup>97</sup> Eckardt, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:56f.

## BISMARCK AND UNIVERSAL MANHOOD SUFFRAGE

In 1848/49, the quest for universal male suffrage had been a powerful mobilizing factor in the unrest that engulfed Germany. On 9 April 1866, the Prussian representative at the German Confederation's diet in Frankfurt stunned his fellow delegates by announcing that Prussia foresaw a German national parliament as a means to overcome German disunity.<sup>98</sup> Such a parliament was to be "chosen by direct election and the universal suffrage from the entire nation." This announcement had the blockbuster effect on public and international opinion that Bismarck hoped for. "A German parliament is of more use to us than an army corps," Bismarck had noted the previous month.<sup>99</sup> Saxon government leader Beust also recognized the historical import of this proposal, which could "easily become the signal for the German revolution."<sup>100</sup>

The democratic suffrage of 1848 has attracted its own scholars, as have the origins of the Prussian three-class suffrage decreed from above on 30 May 1849.<sup>101</sup> That Prussian suffrage was destined to remain in force, with minor alterations, until the collapse of the empire in November 1918. It was seen as *the* bulwark of reaction and the most important impediment to political modernization in Imperial Germany. Yet those who defended or attacked it did so with changing emphases over the years, paying less attention, for example, to the abuses arising from public voting than the unequal weight carried by votes cast in each of three voting classes. Prospects for suffrage reform in the Prussian House of Deputies were always intertwined with efforts to reform or abolish the Prussian House of Lords (Herrenhaus).<sup>102</sup> Between 1849 and 1918, every German suffrage reform proposal was measured, implicitly or explicitly, against the unchanging yardstick of the Prussian system.

According to the Prussian suffrage law of 30 May 1849, subsequently incorporated in the Prussian constitution of 31 January 1850, the Prussian House of Deputies was elected according to a "general" suffrage.<sup>103</sup> All Prussian citizens who had attained the age of twenty-four were entitled to vote, as long as they were male, had not received poor relief from public funds, had not forfeited their civic rights, did not stand under guardianship, and had been resident in one locality for at least six months. Roughly 20 percent of Prussia's entire population was entitled to vote.

The Prussian Landtag suffrage was neither direct nor secret. Instead of voting for actual parliamentary candidates, Prussian Landtag voters (*Urwähler*) cast ballots for

<sup>98</sup> Engelberg, *Widerstreit*, 325–8. See "Prussia's Federal Reform Proposal (9 April 1866)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=596](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=596).

<sup>99</sup> Bismarck to Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 26.3.66, in Gall, *Bismarck*, 1:287.

<sup>100</sup> Werner, 9.4.66, HHStAV, PAV/33.

<sup>101</sup> For Europe, Mattmüller, "Durchsetzung"; Busch/Steinbach, *Wahlgeschichte*; for the pre-March era, Ehrle, *Volksvertretung*; for 1848/49, Schilfert, *Sieg*; Botzenhart, *Parlamentarismus*; Hamerow, "Elections"; for Prussia, Grünthal, "Dreiklassenwahlrecht"; Grünthal, *Parlamentarismus*, esp. chs. I/1–I/2; Droz, "Anschauungen"; KDWR; for 1866 and after, Hamerow, "Origins"; Biefang, "Modernität"; Tödter, "Klassenwahlrechte"; Vogel et al., *Wahlen*, Table G IV, 120–4.

<sup>102</sup> Gerhards/Rössel, *Interessen*, 35–58; Kühne, *Handbuch*, 5; Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*; Spennkuch, *Herrenhaus*.

<sup>103</sup> Grünthal, *Parlamentarismus*, ch. II/3; Huber, *Dokumente* (1978), 1:497–500.

delegates (*Wahlmänner*) who, a week or two later, elected either one or two parliamentary deputies, depending on the size of their constituency. In each round of voting, voters and delegates cast their ballots in groups. Voters assembled in the polling place together, but voted separately as three classes. Within each class, voters were called forward in sequence, beginning with the largest taxpayer within each class: voters were asked to state verbally for which delegate they wished to vote and this statement was recorded in the official protocol. Historians still debate the importance of the Reichstag suffrage in institutionalizing the “ritual” act of voting in national elections.<sup>104</sup> Yet, the casting of a Reichstag ballot was usually over in a matter of minutes. By contrast, the Prussian system typically forced voters and delegates to commit many hours and even days to the process. And whereas the Reichstag balloting procedure emphasized individuality and anonymity, the Prussian system stressed collectivity and openness.

Because the “festival” of voting in Prussia could be extraordinarily tedious, turnout rates were consistently much lower for Prussian Landtag elections than for national ones. Balloting often took place in cramped quarters without sufficient heating in the winter or ventilation in the summer. Nor was the experience carefree. Individual voters calculated to the *Pfennig* the wages lost in the balloting procedures. They were also painfully aware of the social and economic consequences that might follow a decision to vote their political conscience. Public voting provided Prussia’s elites with many opportunities to intimidate dependent voters. There has also been a tendency to portray public voting as having the same effect in all corners of Prussia. Now we know better. Different political factions profited from this scheme according to time and place. In the reactionary 1850s, conservatives were the clear winners. Between 1858 and the mid-1870s, liberals benefited from public voting, after which first conservatives and then the socialists tended again to reap the benefits of intimidation. All parties advocated either public or secret voting based on their actual and expected gains under one system or the other. Contemporary political theorists nevertheless agreed that public voting reflected and strengthened social bonds in the community. To conceal one’s political affiliation through secret balloting was considered “unGerman.”<sup>105</sup>

In contrast to the model of a general suffrage, many Germans in the middle third of the nineteenth century favored a system whereby traditional occupational estates would be directly represented in parliament. By linking formal representation to definable social groups, it was believed that an electoral law could help ameliorate the conflict of opposing social interests: city and countryside, for example, or mobile and immobile capital, or educated elite, *Mittelstand*, and the working classes. An estate-bound parliamentary suffrage was proposed many times in suffrage discussions in Prussia and Saxony. However, by 1866 the breakdown of traditional forms of economic activity—and the social groupings based upon them—made the estate-bound suffrage appear anachronistic. Even the Prussian Conservative Hermann Wagener conceded in March 1867 that the

<sup>104</sup> Suval, *Politics*; Anderson, *Democracy*.

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. Windthorst (Z) in *SBDR* 1867, 1:425 (28.3.67); Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 88.



universal suffrage was unavoidable: "corporative institutions have disintegrated and vanished."<sup>106</sup>

One way to escape the dilemma of segregating social estates was evident both to the Prussians who drafted the suffrage law of May 1849 and to Saxon reformers later. By this strategy, reformers abandoned the unattainable goal of dividing voters according to their qualitative differences (that is, according to social estates). Instead they opted for a scheme whereby voters' *quantitative* contribution to the state could be assessed and rewarded. On this basis the Prussian suffrage became universal but unequal. Under the Prussian system, the division of voters into three classes was done by ranking each male taxpayer over the age of twenty-four hierarchically according to the taxes he paid relative to other taxpayers in his voting precinct. Class I had very few voters in it: typically 3 to 5 percent of tax-payers in the district accounted for one-third of the total taxes paid. The second class had rather more voters: roughly 10–15 percent. Class III had the vast majority of voters, typically 80–85 percent, who paid little or no taxes.<sup>107</sup> In practice, the relatively well-off voters in Classes I and II usually elected delegates who outvoted the delegates elected by poorer voters in Class III and chose men of property or higher education who represented their own class interests.

This three-class system corresponded to popular conceptions of the state as a kind of joint-stock company, whereby the fairest suffrage would allocate votes to citizen "shareholders" on the basis of each one's "investment" (in the form of taxes) in the larger "enterprise" of the state. This model was not seen to be antagonistic to local social, economic, and cultural ties that bound voters together hierarchically. Defenders of the Prussian suffrage argued that all three classes of voters at least had equal weight in determining the final parliamentary representative to be elected. Such arguments were a sham. Each vote cast in the first class had sixteen to twenty-six times the weight of those cast in the third class. Each vote cast in the second class had five to eight times the weight of a third-class vote. This arrangement so disadvantaged voters in the third class that abstention was far higher there than in the first two classes.

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Bismarck did not propose universal manhood suffrage for a national parliament in April 1866 because the Prussian suffrage favored governmental candidates, but because it did the exact opposite. The conservatives' strong showing had ended with the New Era after 1858, when the worst features of government chicanery were abolished. The result was a virtually unassailable liberal majority in the Landtag. By the elections of December 1861, conservatives held a mere fourteen (of 350) seats in the Prussian House of Deputies. After his appointment as Prussian minister president nine months later, Bismarck came to the conclusion that a major suffrage reform in Prussia would provide the means to overcome the liberal

<sup>106</sup> *SBDR* 1867, 1:421 (28.3.67); cf. Hamerow, "Origins," 117; Beck, *Origins*, 107.

<sup>107</sup> *RWA*, 142.

opposition to King Wilhelm I's proposed army increases. In a memo to his cabinet colleagues in December 1864, Bismarck wrote that the three-class suffrage "distorted" the opinion of the majority of voters in Prussia.

Bismarck conceived of the Prussian suffrage—like the future Reichstag suffrage—as one among many interlocking strategies to protect his own authority and that of his king.<sup>108</sup> After the disastrous Prussian elections of 1863, Bismarck planned to convene the Landtag for only short periods of time. The aim, as he later put it, was to heighten the "apathy of the nation" toward the "unfruitful discussions and decisions" in parliament.<sup>109</sup> In May 1866, Bismarck attempted to regain the initiative with further plans to undercut the influence of "industrial and liberal-bureaucratic" circles and what he called the "professors, county judges and small-town chatter-boxes" who dominated the Prussian Landtag.<sup>110</sup> Among Bismarck's proposals were a "mobile election secretariat," the official designation of candidates who enjoyed the government's confidence, and the stipulation that enfranchised Prussians who chose not to cast their ballot should be deemed to have voted for a governmental candidate.

Do these political calculations explain why Bismarck finally opted for universal suffrage? In May 1868 he told a colleague, "It would probably have appealed to people of anxious natures to narrow the [suffrage] through all sorts of cautionary measures; for this there are census [tax-based] thresholds, class-based elections, grading by electors, and other things. But I have never been of an anxious nature."<sup>111</sup> Bismarck was being disingenuous. He abandoned his suspicions of universal suffrage only once he had other strategies in place to fashion reliable majorities. Even in the late autumn of 1866, when the first Reichstag election campaign was getting underway, Bismarck was not sure he had chosen the right course. On 30 October, while he was recovering his health on the Baltic coast, his Putbus Dictations foresaw the possibility of a system whereby one-half of a new national parliament might be elected by "the hundred most highly taxed voters" in each constituency and the other half elected directly by the general populace.<sup>112</sup> A few weeks later Bismarck wrote to Prussian Interior Minister Friedrich zu Eulenburg that the government must designate "government candidates."<sup>113</sup>

Prussian liberals were rightly suspicious of Bismarck's motives in fashioning a national parliament. The introduction of universal suffrage without a true parliamentary system, they argued, indicated that Bismarck was determined to sidestep constitutional principles. Liberals were most adamant in opposing equal and direct elections. Karl Twisten feared that the universal suffrage would bring only

<sup>108</sup> *Denkschrift* (10.9.64) and ministers' Vota in BAP, Rkz 685; cf. Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:183–91; Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 1:218–33; Steinbach, "Elections," 132–8; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 66–92; Augst, *Stellung*, 26–100.

<sup>109</sup> Bismarck's remarks (19.6.65) cited in Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 73.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Anderson, *Conflict*, 144.

<sup>111</sup> Bismarck to Baron von Völderndorff, May 1866, cited in Steinbach, "Elections," 135.

<sup>112</sup> BWiA, 4:8 (30.10.66), foreseeing RT constituencies of 200,000 inhabitants each. See "Bismarck's 'Putbus Dictations' on Germany's Future Constitution (October–November 1866)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1824](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1824).

<sup>113</sup> Bismarck to Eulenburg, 7.12.66, BWiA, 4:24.

“dilettantism” and “charlatanism.” Treitschke predicted that the middle classes in Germany’s towns would be overwhelmed by “factory workers” and “other proletarians.”<sup>114</sup> When Bismarck rose in the Constituent North German Reichstag during debate on the new suffrage in March 1867, he denied that his decision to enfranchise common workers and peasants was directed against the liberal bourgeoisie. Universal suffrage, he declared, was not part of “a deep-laid plot against the freedom of the bourgeoisie” or intended to establish “a Caesarean regime in alliance with the masses.”<sup>115</sup> Bismarck protested too much. Although he was trying to mask the anti-liberal animus behind his thinking, in the early 1860s he had already spoken in one breath about the “legislature, constitutionalism, absolutism, coup d’état, new voting law, [and] *suffrage universel*!”

When Bismarck spoke of “the great mass of the population,” he was thinking of “loyal peasants,” pliant and submissive. “If I, for example, could send here in Prussia 100 workers from my estate to the ballot box, then they would outvote every other opinion in the village to the point of destroying it.”<sup>116</sup> By 1866, many liberals agreed with Bismarck’s assessment, recognizing that the new suffrage could benefit conservatives too. One of them warned that “the feudal party is fast gaining ground among all those who are in any way dependent, and a large part of the farmers are like soft wax, to be molded by anyone who knows how to approach them.”<sup>117</sup>

#### THE SUFFRAGE IN SAXON POLITICS

While preparing Germany’s “national omelet”—the one he didn’t want others sticking their fingers into—the choicest ingredient Bismarck added was universal manhood suffrage.<sup>118</sup> It was certainly not to Beust’s taste or that of Saxon liberals. Even Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm condemned Bismarck’s “piratical politics.” German liberals described Bismarck’s proposal as “frivolous,” “unconscionable,” and “mad.” The satirical *Kladderadatsch* declared that it could no longer compete with this funny-man: “The Bismarck cabinet appeals to the German nation and supports itself upon the people! Hahahaha! Who’s laughing? All Europe.”<sup>119</sup>

What fears did Saxon politicians express about the short- and long-term implications of this leap in the dark? And how did the novelty of a national parliament affect Saxons’ attitudes toward their own state parliament and its electoral law? From the start, Bismarck’s decision to introduce universal suffrage faced heavy sledding in Saxony. Government leader Beust could not understand why Bismarck was “throwing into the frying pan . . . the most powerful ingredient known at that time to liberty-mongers, namely, universal suffrage.”<sup>120</sup> However, Bismarck knew that the suffrage issue would drive a wedge between Beust and his liberal opponents in Saxony. “The middle-sized and smaller states will be forced to go along with us,”

<sup>114</sup> Treitschke, *Prfbb* 18 (1866): 210, cited in Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 82n.

<sup>115</sup> Speech of 28.3.67, BWiA, 4:130–6. <sup>116</sup> Cited in Hamerow, “Origins,” 109 (n.d.).

<sup>117</sup> Kurt von Saucken-Tarputschen, cited in Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 1:270.

<sup>118</sup> BGuE (1998), 317. <sup>119</sup> Cited in Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 1:321.

<sup>120</sup> DAZ, 7/16.4.66, CZ, 18.3.66, 12.4.66, cited in Jordan, *Meinung*, 129f.

Bismarck wrote, because "the democrats in their lands are above all patriotic and German . . . What do the small princes want? Their governments are more reactionary than I am . . . They are certainly afraid of us, but they are more afraid of revolution."<sup>121</sup> He was right. On 10 April 1866 Beust observed that people in Saxony were "*so far*" greeting Bismarck's reform proposal with derisive laughter, but no one could guarantee that the "Germanomania" currently infecting Saxon public opinion might not turn ugly.<sup>122</sup>

By early May 1866 the public mood in Saxony was on a razor's edge. For liberal nationalists, Bismarck's stated intention to revert to the suffrage law agreed by the Frankfurt Assembly on 12 April 1849 was the *least* attractive element of his proposal for a national parliament. They were more pleased that the new national parliament would enjoy extensive legislative authority in areas of trade and commerce, navigation, patent law, and civil jurisprudence. Friedrich Engels had written in 1865 that the proletariat should regard the universal suffrage as "not a weapon but a snare." Wilhelm Liebknecht agreed.<sup>123</sup> In one pre-war rally, he called for a German central authority based on the sovereignty of the people and a representative parliament, but in the same breath he ridiculed the political "changeling" that "Bismarck wants to pass off as a national parliament." "In the shadow cast by a hundred thousand princely bayonets," declared Liebknecht, "and 'in the midst of the uproar of war, no *Volksparlament* can convene."<sup>124</sup>

After Saxony's defeat at Königrätz, Richard von Friesen was burdened by the issue of Saxony's Landtag suffrage, which stood in obvious contrast with a national parliament elected by universal suffrage. Elections according to occupational estates were now so contrary to the "mood of the times," so out of rhythm with the quickening pulse of political life at the national level, that no statesman could resist the call for reform.<sup>125</sup> By the autumn of 1866 many Saxon parliamentarians had come around to a viewpoint voiced in 1860 by a liberal Landtag deputy: "The universal suffrage is neither magical nor miraculous; but just as certainly it is neither a volcano nor a biblical flood."<sup>126</sup> Thus Friesen faced a dilemma: how to steer demands for a democratic suffrage into safe channels?<sup>127</sup>

He was not without answers. The provision of an upper house for the national parliament, he felt, would be the ideal way to revise or overturn Reichstag legislation that the individual states could not accept—far better than relying on Bismarck's plan for a Federal Council. In August 1866, when Friesen still feared outright annexation, he instructed the Saxon envoy in London to pass a memorandum to the Prussians. It advocated a counterweight to the democratically-elected Reichstag that was outlined under a number of rubrics. It might be an "upper chamber," elected by all Germans. It might be a "states' chamber." Or it might be a "princes' chamber," which would emphasize the origins of the North

<sup>121</sup> Stolberg-Wernigerode, "Bismarck-Gespräch," 361.

<sup>122</sup> Jordan, *Meinung*, 131; Werner, 2/3.5.66, HHStAV, PAV/34.

<sup>123</sup> Engels cited in Hamerow, "Origins," 108; Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:54.

<sup>124</sup> Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:181–2.

<sup>125</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:288.

<sup>126</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Ziesler, cited in Müller, "Wahlrecht," 4.2.b.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Klocke, *Politik*, 34.

German Confederation as a voluntary contractual agreement between sovereign German monarchs.<sup>128</sup> This proposal and other options were discussed by the Saxon state ministry in November and December 1866. But when he left for the constitutional discussions held in Berlin in January 1867 that would determine Germany's constitutional outline, Friesen remained deeply troubled by the prospect of national elections with universal manhood suffrage.<sup>129</sup> For him it was "completely impossible to foresee with any certainty which deputies Saxony will send into parliament." Friesen did not accept Bismarck's offhand remark that he expected socialists to be elected in Saxony's more heavily industrialized constituencies. Nor did he put much store in Bismarck's declaration that he intended "to defeat parliamentarism with parliament itself."<sup>130</sup>

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These remarks suggest that Friesen and Bismarck favored different tactics but had the same strategic goal in view. Bismarck preferred some "cautionary measures" that Friesen considered to be of little or no value as correctives to universal suffrage. Conversely, Bismarck dismissed as ineffective some other safeguards that Friesen considered essential. Of the latter, the tax threshold for enfranchisement is the best example. Friesen tried to persuade Bismarck in 1866 that Reichstag voters should have to demonstrate a minimum taxable income for enfranchisement. Subsequently the Saxon government made a tax threshold of 1 Thaler (3 Marks) the basis for its Landtag suffrage proposal of 1868. However, Bismarck firmly believed that making parliament more plutocratic would only strengthen the liberal majority, and he vowed that he would never support a tax threshold.

Against the backdrop of events chronicled in this chapter, we can now understand why Friesen was so apprehensive about Saxony's first experiment with universal suffrage. "You will have to concede," Friesen told Prussian envoy Friedrich von Landsberg, "that all of us in Germany must rely for support on the conservative parties. But the conservative parties have been dealt a death blow by the introduction of a parliament that is elected through universal, direct voting and that lacks a conservative counterweight." Friesen hoped that the upcoming Reichstag elections would produce "good tolerable results" (the envoy wrote "good" in his draft; either he or Friesen then thought better of it and substituted "tolerable" instead). But clearly Friesen looked on the first test of the Reichstag suffrage with trepidation, for "things could be completely different a year from now."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>128</sup> The corresponding terms were *Oberhaus*, *Staatenhaus*, and *Fürstenhaus*. Memorandum (copy) (17.8.66), SHStAD, MdAA 1013; Vitzthum von Eckstädt, *London*, 273ff.; Becker, *Ringen*, 321f.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. British envoy to Bavaria, Henry F. Howard (Munich), to British FO, 3.12.66, PRO, FO 9/177; excerpted as "The Public Mood in Bavaria and Other Federal States through British Eyes (3 December 1866)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1817](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1817).

<sup>130</sup> BWiA, 4:69.

<sup>131</sup> Landsberg, 19/29.12.66 (drafts), GStAB, HA I, Rep. 81, IV A, Nr. 28a.

## 2

### The Possibilities of Liberal Reform

In “The Liberalism of Fear” (1989), the Harvard political scientist Judith Shklar cautioned liberals never to let down their guard against the state, which is always capable of “arbitrary, unexpected, unnecessary, and unlicensed acts of force.” Shklar expressed doubt that democracy was the ultimate safeguard of liberal values: “liberalism is monogamously, faithfully, and permanently married to democracy—but it is a marriage of convenience.”<sup>1</sup>

The years from 1866 to 1876 are regarded by historians of the Second Reich as an era of far-reaching liberal achievements. Such a claim is justified when considering constitutional, legal, commercial, and other reforms implemented at the Reich level. This chapter and the Saxon example suggest that a more ambiguous conclusion is called for when subnational developments are appraised. After a rocky opening round of Reichstag elections, when Conservative particularists almost swept Saxon constituencies in February 1867, National Liberals staged a comeback six months later. Even more surprising was the Saxon Landtag’s ability to reform its own suffrage in December 1868. Liberal ideals about electoral fairness were conspicuous in the new law. Saxony’s two liberal parties then gained a parliamentary majority in the Saxon Landtag elections of June 1869. Suffrage reform had put Conservatives on the defensive. For the next five years, the government of Richard von Friesen had to navigate between the ingrained conservatism of political institutions and liberals’ confidence that the future belonged to them. But was this Saxony’s liberal era? Did German liberals remain vigilant—fearful enough—against counterattacks? Shklar’s essay gives us pause for thought. As she observed after reviewing liberalism’s high points in British, French, and American history, “to speak of a liberal era is not to refer to anything that actually happened.”

#### THE REICHSTAG ELECTIONS OF FEBRUARY 1867

[They] curse the hour when Count Bismarck took it into his head to carry out manhood suffrage.

—of National Liberal Reichstag deputies,  
traveling to Berlin, February 1867<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shklar, “Liberalism,” 4, 11, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Archer Crowe, British consul in Leipzig, 22.2.67, PRO, FO 68/147.

He speaks to Me as if I was a public meeting.

—of William Gladstone, by Queen Victoria<sup>3</sup>

By one measure the campaign for elections to the Constituent North German Reichstag was extremely short; by another it was unusually long. In late November 1866 some political observers still thought the elections would be held in December or January. “Confusion and delay” intervened and polling day was finally set for Tuesday, 12 February 1867.<sup>4</sup> In a way, the campaign had begun in April 1866 when Bismarck first announced his plans for a national parliament. This was not the only innovation to mark these elections. There was no previous session of the Reichstag to provide those bread and butter themes that so often dominate a campaign. When February came, polling irregularities and the incomplete reporting of results revealed local officials’ ignorance about the new voting regulations. Though some chicanery was overt, these elections were characterized more by ineptness than manipulation.<sup>5</sup> The novelty of the exercise made Saxons edgy. For some, these elections brought a new dawn. For others, they mirrored the “sickness of the times.”

#### THE NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

Germany’s first Reichstag election campaign took place simultaneously in more than one political forum. Electoral associations were founded and candidates were nominated belatedly, mainly in December 1866. Even though Saxony had been divided into twenty-three Reichstag constituencies (see Map 2.1)—their boundaries did not change between 1867 and 1918—regional party leaders rather than local ones took the initiative in most of them.

The campaign itself was pressed in newspapers and journals, pamphlet literature, public assemblies, municipal council chambers, and during Saxony’s Landtag elections in September and October 1866. It then became the object of heated debate on the floor of the Saxon Landtag after it convened on 15 November 1866.

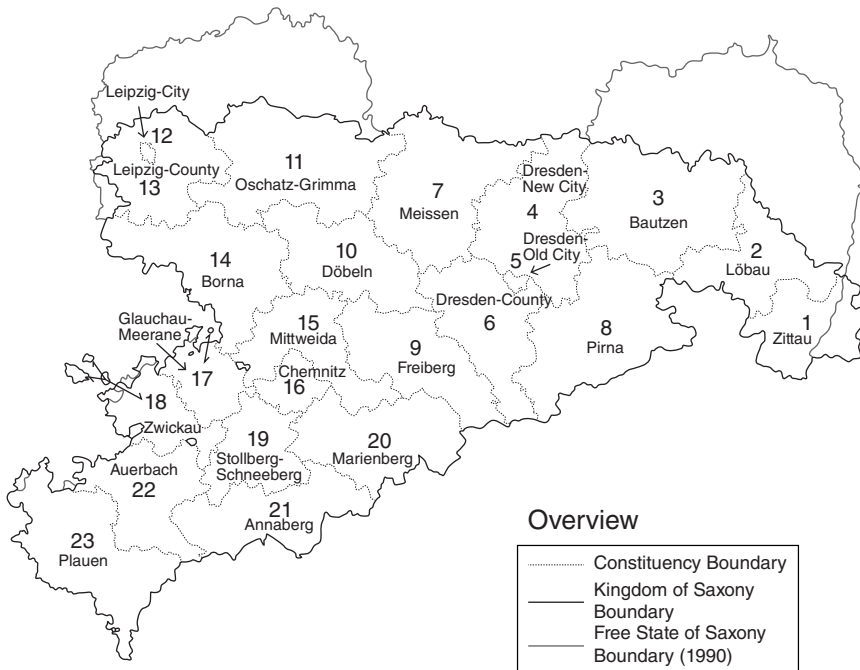
The socialists had few newspapers at their disposal; they relied mainly on public rallies and posters to spread their message. The Progressives could count on their Berlin organs reaching Saxon readers, the Conservatives much less so. But the kingdom’s press landscape, including total newspaper circulation of about 100,000, was not a level playing field.<sup>6</sup> Saxony’s semi-official press left no doubt about where its political sympathies lay. Prussian Civil Commissar Lothar von Wurmb observed that the “usual” distinction between liberal and conservative newspapers did not

<sup>3</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Collections and Recollections* (1898), ch. 14.

<sup>4</sup> US Ambassador to Germany, Joseph A. Wright (Berlin), to US Department of State (Washington, DC), 26.11.66; NARA 59, M44, reel 13.

<sup>5</sup> Landsberg (drafts), 2/26/31.1.67, GStAB, HA I, GsD, IV A, 29a; cf. Werner, 9.1.67, HHStAV, PAV/35.

<sup>6</sup> See [Petermann], “Statistik.”



**Map 2.1.** Reichstag Constituencies in the Kingdom of Saxony (overview). © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. Adapted by the author from LRTW. See Online Supplement for other maps: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

hold in Saxony: they had to be categorized as pro- or anti-Prussian instead.<sup>7</sup> Wurmb recommended that Bismarck add two experienced journalists to the staff of the National Liberals' *Constitutionelle Zeitung*, which, he counseled, should also be sent inside information from Bismarck's Literary Bureau in Berlin to make it a kind of clearing house for pro-Prussian opinion in Saxony. But experienced journalists like Karl Biedermann and Moritz Busch remained pessimistic about the liberal nationalists' ability to combat the hegemony of conservative opinion. The *Leipziger Zeitung*, the *Dresdner Journal*, and the semi-official local gazettes (*Amtsblätter*)—roughly fifty to seventy in number—were obliged to toe the government line.<sup>8</sup> The lifeblood of these gazettes was the paid notices placed by police authorities and town councils. As Busch noted, they also published “the poems of village pastors, schoolmasters, or lower officials who complain about the exile of our good king” and anything that “tugs at the reader's heartstrings.” These gazettes, Busch added, were “infinitely more important” than large newspapers, and they

<sup>7</sup> Wurmb to Prussian FO, 23.11.66, GStAB, HA III, 2.4.1. I, 9156. For a list of major newspapers in Saxony (November 1866), see the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>8</sup> Schmidt, *Geschichte*; Hense, “Leipziger Zeitung”; Bandmann, *Presse*, 182–6; [Witzleben], *Sachsen*; Fiedler, *Geschichte*; Reichert, “Haltung”; Blum, “Zeitung.”



represented the prevailing anti-Prussian viewpoint in Saxony. "If things are not brought to order, all efforts to enlighten and stir up public opinion in these circles . . . will probably yield only very modest results."<sup>9</sup>

But the Prussians did not bring things to order. The extreme particularist *Sächsische Zeitung* was founded on 1 November 1866, just in time for the election campaign.<sup>10</sup> It was led by Leipzig Regional Governor Carl von Burgsdorff, an arch-conservative enemy of liberal nationalists who had been banished from Saxony by Prussian occupiers. He returned almost before the ink on the peace treaty was dry. The *Sächsische Zeitung's* circulation was not large but it served Conservatives well. One Conservative nobleman felt moved to order fifty copies for the townspeople living near his landed estate: it was to be "voluntarily" put on display in public taverns.<sup>11</sup> This organ was less important, though, than other newspapers occupying the gray area between conservatives and the government. Whereas the *Leipziger Zeitung*, edited by Cäsar von Witzleben, occasionally embarrassed the government by attacking the liberal nationalists too fiercely, the *Dresdner Journal* remained "cool and correct."<sup>12</sup> The political pamphlets that flooded Saxony during the Reichstag campaign provided other means of agitation. An obscure author could rush a tract into print to refute charges made just days earlier in opponents' public rallies and newspapers.<sup>13</sup> Petitions to parliament or the king also made political campaigns more nimble. They mobilized local groups whose activities had hitherto been restricted to contesting municipal elections.

We know next to nothing about the election campaign in many parts of Saxony. But some general observations can be made for Dresden, Chemnitz, and Leipzig. Saxony's capital was largely undisturbed by left liberals or liberal nationalists. A broadly conservative Municipal Association discussed mainly local issues, and its dominance continued through the municipal elections of December 1866 (such elections were usually held in the last two months of the year). In Chemnitz, Conservatives were organized in the Constitutional Electoral Association, their opponents in the Municipal Electoral Association. To improve their showing in the upcoming Reichstag elections and to avoid rival candidacies, Chemnitz's "most influential and important industrialists" organized a General Election Committee to rally support for the North German Confederation.<sup>14</sup> Elections to Leipzig's municipal assembly and to its Landtag constituencies had been contested by two organizations before 1866: the Conservatives' Patriotic Association, which numbered at most 400 members, and the liberal electoral association, Truth and Justice. In these contests the liberals had held the upper hand for fifteen years. No longer in 1866. On 5 November, just two days after King Johann returned to Dresden,

<sup>9</sup> Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:356f.; Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, 3:553f. (13.8.66).

<sup>10</sup> Jordan, *Meinung*, 229; Eckardt, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:109.

<sup>11</sup> *Gb* 31, 1. Sem., 1. Bd. (1872): 271; *Vaterl.*, 14.12.00.

<sup>12</sup> Eckardt, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:109.

<sup>13</sup> See [Witzleben], *Sachsen; Gegenwart; National-Liberalen; Vergangenheit*; Fischer, *Dynastie; Hülfesruf; Bund*. Other pamphlets in Faber, *Publizistik*, 2:94–103, 183–97; Jordan, *Meinung*, 192–202; Richter, *Meinung*, 58–75.

<sup>14</sup> Strauss/Finsterbusch, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 12; Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:385f.

members of the Patriotic Association organized a delegation of 145 Leipzig notables: they traveled by special train to Dresden to deliver an "address of loyalty" to the king with more than 2,000 signatures.<sup>15</sup> A few days later Leipzig voters cast about 1,600 ballots for the delegates of the Patriotic Association, and only about 1,400 for those affiliated with Truth and Justice. This defeat convinced Biedermann that he had no hope of being elected to the Reichstag.<sup>16</sup> By late November acrimonious debates in Leipzig's municipal assembly had already prompted calls in the Landtag for an end to "party passions," "insinuations," "incitement," "rancor against Prussia," "fanatical hatred of Prussia," and "provincial egoism."<sup>17</sup> Was Saxony's public sphere really so poisonous?

Yes, answered the British consul in Leipzig, Joseph Archer Crowe. He was not alone in believing that "symptoms of violent disagreement" and "bitter warfare" during the Prussian occupation would continue to dominate the public sphere as three groups of Saxons squared off against each other.<sup>18</sup> The "extreme liberals of Leipzig," Crowe observed, had not wanted the king to return at all. The "patriotic" or "particularist" Saxons had hoped that some international or other event might improve Saxony's fortunes before peace was finalized. And "the mass of the industrious and mercantile community" wanted "the protection which Prussia would afford against external dangers and the safe enjoyment of the Customs Union." No group was satisfied with the status quo. The king and his ministers still worried that Prussia might annex Saxony outright, although Crowe himself, as a sometime member of "The Kitzing," was impatient to see exactly this outcome.<sup>19</sup>

Government leader Richard von Friesen and Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz had other ideas. They joined the "sharp" Landtag debates that began on 28 November 1866 and continued for a fortnight. Both ministers sought to banish talk of the past. And both sought to postpone reform for the future.<sup>20</sup> But Crowe correctly observed that they would not be able to dispel "the questions which agitate the public mind" as the Reichstag campaign moved into high gear: "Will the resolutions of the national parliament be binding on the local parliaments or not? Is the former to override the latter? Is the consent of the latter to be asked?" Even the liberal nationalists were "in great doubt" about what universal manhood suffrage would bring. They were becoming less enamored of a democratic suffrage: "They fear that their influence will be lost in the mass of ignorance and prejudice which pervades the least educated class of electors, and they believe that the Saxon deputies will either be '*separatists*' (i.e. opposed to the unity of Germany) or '*socialists*.'"<sup>21</sup> Conservative leaders were worried too. Saxony's present condition

<sup>15</sup> Crowe, 10.11.66, PRO, FO 68/144; Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:330; LZ, 6.11.66, in Richter, *Meinung*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> LZ, 17.11.66, DAZ, 16.11.66, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 64; DAZ, LZ, LTA, all 19.10.66, cited in Jordan, *Meinung*, 209f.

<sup>17</sup> LTMitt 1866/67, II.K., 1:52–4 (28.11.66); I.K., 1:16–24 (3.12.66).

<sup>18</sup> For the following, see Crowe, 29.10.66, 20/30.11.66, 11.12.66, PRO, FO 68/144. Cf. Gise, 30.11.66, 14.12.66, BHStAM II, MA 2841; Landsberg, 12.1.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

<sup>19</sup> Other British envoys sometimes disparaged Crowe's pro-Prussian blinkers; see e.g. BETG, 4:365–9.

<sup>20</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:333.

<sup>21</sup> Original emphasis.

was “replete with difficulties” that might bring either “blessings or curses” on the kingdom.<sup>22</sup> The Christmas spirit was noticeably lacking when street brawls broke out in early December—not only between Prussian and Saxon troops but also between Prussian troops and Saxon civilians.<sup>23</sup>

Conservatives came closest to establishing what might be called a political machine.<sup>24</sup> Only they offered viable candidates in each of Saxony’s twenty-three Reichstag constituencies. In the first week of December, the Conservatives founded a Saxon Electoral Committee (*Wahlcomité*) for the North German Parliament. It stressed the Conservatives’ “patriotic” credentials to avoid alienating the mass of voters for whom the word “conservative” might be off-putting. This eighteen-member committee was drawn mainly from members of the upper and lower houses of the Saxon Landtag. The Conservatives sought to avoid the odium of representing agrarian interests alone by including six businessmen, factory owners, and artisans. This committee selected Conservative nominees in almost all Saxon constituencies, with little or no input from local party associations.

The credentials of Conservative candidates usually included some combination of service as a Landtag deputy or in Saxony’s administration, honorific titles, and management of a middle-sized or large estate. These candidates ran in constituencies that will henceforth be cited by their number (Saxony 1–23) and shortened name (e.g. 19: Stollberg for Stollberg-Lößnitz-Schneeberg). Among such candidates the most noteworthy were Ludwig von Zehman (7: Meißen); Wilhelm von Oehmischen-Choren (10: Döbeln), vice-president of the Saxon lower chamber; Raimund Sachße (9: Freiberg), a lawyer and Freiberg’s deputy mayor; Ludwig Haberkorn (1: Zittau), president of the lower house and mayor of Zittau; Carl Gerber (13: Leipzig-County), the future minister of culture; and Kurt von Einsiedel (20: Marienberg), a retired colonel and district governor in Annaberg.

We know less about the socialist, Progressive, and liberal nationalist campaigns. These parties held a flurry of meetings in early December 1866, which initially produced meager results. Relations between the Lassalleans and Bebel’s group remained fraught. Two supporters of the Saxon People’s Party, Julius Vahlreich and Reinhold Schrapf (a Dresden lawyer), defended the strategy of allying with the Progressives. This was not to the taste of the Lassallean socialists, whose leaders in Dresden and Leipzig were the coppersmith Emil Försterling and the head of the tobacco workers’ movement Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche. Eventually the Lassalleans fielded seven candidates, whereas the Saxon People’s Party ran only Bebel, Liebknecht, and Schrapf.

The left-liberal Progressives were slowest to get up to speed. They were led by a famous ’48er and long-time opponent of Beust: estate owner Christian Riedel (1: Zittau), known as “Old Riedel.” Familiar faces appeared in other key races: the

<sup>22</sup> LZ, 18/30.11.66, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 67f.

<sup>23</sup> Werner, 5.12.66, HHStAV, PAV/34.

<sup>24</sup> For the following see BHStAM II, MA 2841; GStAB, HA I, GsD, IV A, 28a–b, 29a–b; PAAAB, Sachsen 39; PRO, FO 68/142/144/147; HHStAV, PAV/34 and PAV/35; Richter, *Meinung*, 69ff.; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 84–92; Schröder, “Genese,” 153–7.

Dresden doctor and assemblyman Franz Wigard (5: Dresden-Old City); the Pirna lawyer Hermann Schreck (8: Pirna), who had ties to industrialists in and around Dresden; Dr. Eduard Minckwitz (19: Stollberg), another lawyer who had served a jail term after 1849 and who already sat in the Landtag's lower house and on Dresden's city council; and Zwickau's mayor, Lothar Streit (18: Zwickau), who later served as vice-president of Saxony's lower house. These were men who had fought the good fight since 1848. Wigard spoke for himself and his colleagues when he observed that "their life was their program."<sup>25</sup> The liberal nationalists, meanwhile, failed to rally new support. In November Biedermann drafted his own "Program of the Liberal Nationalists After the Peace." But following the set-back in Leipzig's city elections, things looked bleaker than ever. The liberal nationalists mounted serious campaigns only in 12: Leipzig-City and 17: Glauchau-Meerane.<sup>26</sup>

#### CAMPAIGN THEMES, KEY RACES

One historian has stressed the plebiscitary nature of the national Reichstag campaign of 1866–67.<sup>27</sup> Plebiscitary elections can mitigate uncertainties about untried voting practices, by making the choices seem reassuringly simple, or they can heighten one's sense of taking a leap in the dark, by stressing the irreversibility of the outcome. The conflict between liberal nationalists and their Saxon opponents *seemed* to boil down to a "yes or no" vote for the North German Confederation.<sup>28</sup> But the Confederation was not the same thing as Prussia. Therefore it was possible for political allies to be in favor of the Confederation on principle and yet disagree about the strength of the bonds tying the individual states to Prussia. Conservatives stressed diplomatic and dynastic reasons for looking southward to Austria. Progressives and Social Democrats emphasized Bismarck's domestic tyranny. Yet whereas the Progressives advocated a policy of no-compromise with the northern neighbor that had sent troops to help quell the Dresden Uprising in May 1849, the Social Democrats stressed other aspects of Prussian repression. It proved easy for the Conservative *Sächsische Zeitung* to mask its true colors by calling on all Saxons to register a "protest vote."

Political allies could also be in favor of a national parliament in principle but hold differing views as to its make-up and its constitutional competence. The liberal nationalists believed that the Reichstag should have wide constitutional powers and provide a strong counter-weight to the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*).<sup>29</sup> By contrast, the Conservatives believed that what remained of Saxony's independence would best be defended by a relatively weak national parliament. The Progressives and Social Democrats agreed that Germany required a strong central government and a national parliament with extensive powers. But they vehemently defended the

<sup>25</sup> DN, 7.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 73; cf. Gerber, "Briefen," 246.

<sup>26</sup> CZ, 26.1.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 93–154; Steinbach, *Zähmung*, 1:93–148.

<sup>28</sup> VZ, 9.1.67, cited in Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> Landsberg (draft), 26.1.67, GStAB, HA I, GsD, IV A, 28a.

rights of non-Prussian territories. The result was a confusing mix of political positions that was also found in other parts of the North German Confederation.

Conservative agitation ranged from statesmanlike reflection to biting polemics. The latter was typified by a stinging Conservative broadside entitled *The So-Called National Liberals of Leipzig under the Microscope of Public Opinion*.<sup>30</sup> This pamphlet tried to link Saxony's forced entry into the North German Confederation with the unwelcome activation of Saxon party politics. One focus of the anonymous author's attack was universal manhood suffrage, described as one of Bismarck's most unfortunate concessions to the liberal nationalists. The author accused Bismarck and the liberal nationalists of striving to establish the "unitary state" under the aegis of "Caesarism." He added that Leipzig's "Borussian-Saxon" liberal nationalists were deceitful: they had assumed the black-white colors of Prussia in order to win a "warm little niche" in both Leipzig's municipal assembly and the North German Reichstag. By contrast, this author demanded "*one* parliament in which the representatives of all German states have *equal rights*." The notion of equal rights ended there, however. The author complained that, with the end of the Beust system, "the wicked [Saxon] police are no longer permitted to turn the gas off" when liberal nationalists gathered together. But another means of "disinfection" would be found, he predicted, to eliminate the "current liberal nationalist epidemic" in Saxony.

Many Conservatives refused to make any concession to the new style of politics—and were elected anyway. In the countryside some did not participate in their own campaign at all. In 2: Löbau the elderly Heinrich von Thielau categorically refused to address his voters publicly: "He is not a market crier and he hasn't even read the draft constitution," wrote one supporter.<sup>31</sup> In the cities, it was not always possible to remain so aloof. But the political engagement necessary in such constituencies only increased Conservatives' sour feelings toward the universal suffrage. During the campaign in 13: Leipzig-County, the Conservative candidate Carl Gerber wrote on 31 December 1866, "What will the new year bring? One finds a world full of disquiet and partisanship. On the one side, forcible revolution from above, on the other, philistinism, particularist pettiness, and egoism."<sup>32</sup>

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The look and feel of Germany's first Reichstag campaign can be conveyed by considering a few constituency races to which contemporaries paid special attention.<sup>33</sup>

Besides Gerber's campaign in 13: Leipzig-County, the contests in 12: Leipzig-City and all three Dresden constituencies (4, 5, and 6) emerged as key races. This does not mean that some rural constituencies were not hotly contested too; but there, government influence reinforced pre-existing structures of authority and

<sup>30</sup> *National-Liberalen*, esp. 4–7 (original emphasis). Cf. [Zehmen], *Patrioten*.

<sup>31</sup> *BN*, 5.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Gerber, "Briefen," 225f.

<sup>33</sup> For further details about constituency populations, candidate names, and votes cast in February 1867, see the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

produced some lop-sided contests. In 3: Bautzen the Conservative candidate was Hermann von Salza-Lichtenau, a thirty-seven-year-old estate owner and district governor. His victory in February 1867, with roughly 90 percent of the popular vote, may be ascribed to the same factors that helped other Conservative candidates in rural areas. In local government gazettes, Conservative promises (and rumors) claimed that transportation links would be improved if the local population favored the district governor with its support on polling day: some notices were sponsored by "thankful communities" even before the fact. Pastors urged voters to support the candidate most dedicated to preserving the church and other institutions of authority. Village councils usually supported Conservatives. Even schoolteachers joined in: they helped pupils improve their penmanship by having them write the Conservative candidate's name on blank ballots. In 2: Löbau, thirty-five voters were given no choice but to use the official, stamped ballots they received, with the Conservative candidate's name pre-printed on them.<sup>34</sup> The combined effect of such practices was considerable. As Moritz Busch noted in his diary when he traveled outward from Leipzig to reconnoiter the political hinterland, "The great mass of rural people are . . . wholly under the influence of officials and pastors, who are motivated in part . . . by fear that a strict brand of Prussianism will demand a great deal of work from them and disturb their sleepy laxness . . . Some energy is being expended only by the opponents of Prussia, mainly through boasting and complaining."<sup>35</sup>

The contest in 12: Leipzig-City illustrated how the political temperature was raised in urban areas when liberal nationalists played a more prominent role.<sup>36</sup> Karl Biedermann had difficulty cooling the annexationist blood that still flowed in the veins of his supporters. Eventually the odium of having two party nominees compete against each other was avoided: the liberal nationalists united behind the deputy mayor of Leipzig, Eduard Stephani.<sup>37</sup> At some point late in the campaign Stephani wrote a confused letter claiming he would "not lift a finger" to get elected. This letter fell into the hands of the *Sächsische Zeitung*, which supported the Conservative candidate Carl Wächter, a law professor in Leipzig and darling of Conservative particularists.<sup>38</sup> On the Saxon left, the Progressives, the Lassalleans, and Bebel's party each ran a candidate. Liebknecht received a letter from one of his supporters on 6 February urging him to rush to Leipzig before election day: "we cannot spare even one vote." Given this array of opponents, Stephani's showing for the liberal nationalists was anything but embarrassing. He outpolled his Conservative opponent by more than 1,000 votes on the first ballot and came within a hair of the absolute majority needed for victory. Under the Reichstag suffrage this meant that the two candidates with the highest vote totals would face each other in a

<sup>34</sup> See CZ, 26.1.67, BN, 6.1.67, LZ, 10.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 74f.

<sup>35</sup> Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, 3:552 (13.8.66).

<sup>36</sup> On Chemnitz cf. Heilmann, *Geschichte*, 31; Dietrich, "Kampf," 220; Hofmann, "Arbeiterbewegung," 139–69.

<sup>37</sup> Boettcher, *Stephani*, 85f.; Robert Schweichel to Liebknecht, 6.2.67, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:203ff.

<sup>38</sup> Von Wächter after 1879; Kern, *Romanistik*, 11–47; Windscheid, *Wächter*.

second, run-off ballot. When it was held on 20 February, the Conservative candidate Wächter drew to his side most of those who had not voted on the first ballot, as well as the majority of Progressive and Lassalleian voters and—according to Liebknecht—every single supporter of the Saxon People's Party.<sup>39</sup> Stephani, completely isolated, lost the race.

That Conservatives and Social Democrats were willing to offer each other support against liberal nationalists was illustrated most clearly in the three constituencies of southwestern Saxony (17, 18, and 19) contested by the Saxon People's Party. In each of these contests the Social Democrats were hampered by an almost total lack of funds and suitable personnel; otherwise they would gladly have targeted other constituencies too. Yet a number of factors favored them: proximity to Social Democratic associations in Leipzig; the abject poverty of the local weavers and other textile workers in the foothills of the Erzgebirge; the mixed urban-rural make-up of the region (where many workers and artisans operated from home workshops); and the high rate of population increase.<sup>40</sup> Bebel recalled that his itinerant campaign in 17: Glauchau-Meerane found him sleeping in the humble homes of his supporters, either in the marriage bedroom itself or with the family cat on the sofa. In 19: Stollberg, Liebknecht was not so lucky—in either February or August 1867. Liebknecht wrote of the extreme physical demands of walking for hours from town to town, first in the winter snows and then in the burning heat of summer, delivering campaign speeches at each stop and sleeping fitfully when he could. After the August campaign, he was unable to work for weeks. Liebknecht spent most of the first campaign in a Prussian jail cell. Having returned to Berlin in October 1866 under the mistaken impression that his case was covered by a general Prussian amnesty, he was immediately arrested. Sentenced to three months imprisonment, deprived of light in his cell after 6 p.m., and released in mid-January 1867, Liebknecht could assist with only the last phase of his campaign. This left almost no time to care for his critically ill wife, who longed for the day “when that stupid election is over!” Her death in May 1867 left Liebknecht with two children to care for on his own. He swore to exact revenge on the Prussians who took him from his wife's bedside.<sup>41</sup>

## REACTIONS

Voter turnout in Saxony on 12 February 1867 was higher than in Prussia and most other federal states. Somewhere between 64 and 70 percent of eligible Saxon voters trooped to the polls.<sup>42</sup> For both Saxony and the North German Confederation as a

<sup>39</sup> Liebknecht to Gottschald, [22.2.67], in Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:209f.

<sup>40</sup> BAml, 151ff.; Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:203ff.; Heilmann, *Geschichte*, 31–9; Pollmann, “Arbeiterwahlen,” 171; Benser, *Herausbildung*, ch. 5; Bormann, “Arbeiterbewegung,” 102f.; Schaarschmidt, *Geschichte*.

<sup>41</sup> Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:209–18; Heilmann, *Geschichte*, 34ff., 59f.; Schröder, “Liebknecht,” 157–9.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. CZ, 25.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 75; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 139ff.; Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:324ff.; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 90.

whole, this turnout rate was higher than in 1848 or for elections to the Prussian Landtag; it was not matched again until the Reichstag elections of 1887. This is all the more remarkable considering the hasty preparations and the winter weather. There were other good reasons to remain away from the polls. For workers the loss of a few hours wages was hardly insignificant. But the wish to play a part in determining the North German Confederation's future compensated for the uncertain rewards of voting.

A surviving collection of spoiled ballots from 5: Dresden-Old City suggests that many Saxons enjoyed the novelty of the exercise, though more than a few were perplexed.<sup>43</sup> Since the preferred candidate's name had to be written onto a blank ballot, some voters integrated his name into snatches of doggerel; others signed their own name instead. Some pasted pre-distributed slips of paper onto the ballot, only to find it came loose and was disallowed. Others chose to express their favor for Prussian Civil Commissar von Wurmb or for Bismarck. In Berlin, when Bismarck and his ministers surveyed the favorable outcome in the confederation as a whole, they were surprised that this experiment with democracy had "passed off quietly."<sup>44</sup> The Conservatives' leading national newspaper, the *Kreuzzeitung*, noted with relief that the introduction of universal suffrage had not led to the election of "uneducated little people."<sup>45</sup> When the Reichstag session opened on 24 February 1867, it was still not clear how the individual party caucuses would constitute themselves. But estimates of national party strengths at the beginning and at the end of the session did not diverge very much (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Party Caucuses in the Constituent North German Reichstag, April 1867

Party Orientation	Seats (Harris)	Seats (Pollmann)
Conservatives	66	66/59
Free Conservatives	40	39/39
Old Liberals ( <i>Altliberale</i> )	27	28/27
National Liberals	76	81/79
Progressives/Leftists ( <i>Fortschritt/Linke</i> )	20	20/19
Free Unionists, Free Liberals ( <i>Freie Vereinigung/Freiliberale</i> )	13	13/15
Federalist-Constitutionalists ( <i>Bundesstaatlich-Konstitutionelle</i> )	20	20/18
Poles, Poles/Danes*	13	15/13
Danes	3	0/0
Saxon People's Party	2	2/0
Independents ( <i>bei keiner Fraktion</i> )	17	13/28
Total	297	297/297

Note: The figures from Pollmann reflect the beginning (Feb.)/end (Apr.) of the parliamentary session, respectively.

\* Poles in Harris listed as Poles/Danes in Pollmann.

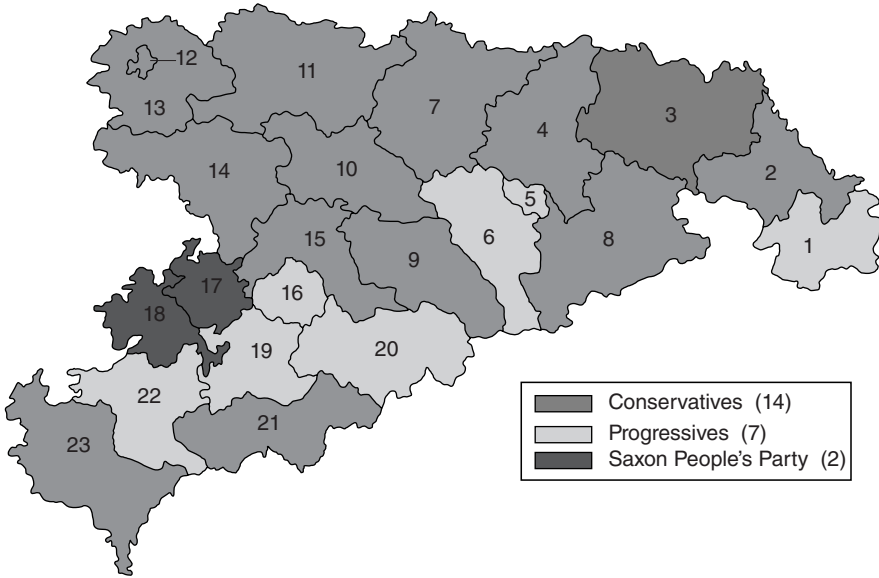
Sources: Harris, "Parteigruppierung," 184; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 545, 171.

<sup>43</sup> StadtAD, 2.1.6, G.I., Nr. 76 (also Nr. 80 for the RT election of 31.8.67); cf. StadtAL, Kap. 1, Nr. 5.

<sup>44</sup> John C. Wright (for his father), 18.2.67, NARA 59, M44, reel 14.

<sup>45</sup> KZ, 21.2.67; cf. Steinbach, *Zähmung*, 1:138–48; Baden's envoy to Prussia, 15.2.67, GLAK, Abt. 59, IV 2004.





**Map 2.2.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 12 February 1867. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. Drawn by the author.

The election outcome in Saxony was substantially different than in the Reich. Observers had predicted that Conservative candidates stood a good chance of winning more than half of Saxony's twenty-three Reichstag seats. And they did—fourteen seats, won with approximately 51 percent of the total votes cast.<sup>46</sup> The Progressives won seven seats, with about 39 percent, while the Saxon People's Party elected two candidates (Bebel and Schrap) with about 6 percent of the popular vote (see Map 2.2). The Lassalleans received only 3 percent, about the same as the National Liberals, and neither party won a seat.

This was a protest vote with a vengeance. The Conservatives and Progressives in Saxony had assumed a mistrustful "wait-and-see" attitude toward the North German Confederation. Yet these two parties elected twenty-one of twenty-three Saxon deputies to the Reichstag. The two socialists rejected the Confederation outright. The National Liberals could legitimately claim the events of 1866 to be a vindication of their political agenda. But they came up empty.

Press commentary was predictable. A writer in the conservative *Leipziger Zeitung* declared categorically that "the vast majority of the Saxon population wants to have nothing to do with the annexationist party." The National Liberals' *Constitutionelle Zeitung* saw things differently. The election outcome, one of its writers claimed, was lamentable, even laughable. Saxony was not sending its best representatives to Berlin: "Our absurd hatred of the Prussians has played a nasty trick on us."<sup>47</sup> The

<sup>46</sup> CZ, 25.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> LZ, 23.2.67, CZ, 20.2.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 76.

Saxon king and his state ministers were more ambivalent. King Johann claimed that he had “always considered these elections to be a very dangerous experiment whose outcome is impossible to predict, and this now seems to have been confirmed.”<sup>48</sup>

Diplomats stationed in Dresden conveyed mixed opinions too.<sup>49</sup> Baron Maximilian von Gise wrote that the election results in Saxony were “satisfactory” because “they revealed that the overwhelming majority of the Saxon population desires the preservation of [Saxony’s] independence and integrity.” This was consistent with the particularist views of Bavaria. The Austrian envoy echoed King Johann’s frustration that Conservative disunity had allowed one of their “less worthy” rivals to take Dresden. British consul Joseph Crowe reported from Leipzig that liberals would be traveling to Berlin with “heavy hearts”: some of them believed that Bismarck now intended to “annihilate” the Prussian Landtag. The Prussian envoy Friedrich von Eichmann hit the mark when he observed that only “the outcome of the parliamentary debates in Berlin will determine whether the Saxon or the German tendency remains dominant in the land.”

## SAXONY AND THE NORTH GERMAN CONFEDERATION

Now that peace has been agreed, the consolidation of the North German Confederation depends above all on the cooperation or opposition of Saxony.

—Otto von Bismarck to Prussian Crown Prince  
Friedrich Wilhelm, 3 February 1867<sup>50</sup>

I don’t want loyalty. I want *loyalty*. I want him to kiss my ass in Macy’s window at high noon and tell me it smells like roses. I want his pecker in my pocket.

—Lyndon B. Johnson, 36th President of the United States,  
discussing a prospective assistant<sup>51</sup>

Did the Reichstag elections in February 1867 undermine King Johann’s pledge of loyalty to the North German Confederation?<sup>52</sup> We know Bismarck paid close attention in January and March 1867 when he read reports that Saxons entertained “an unmistakable disinclination to accept uncritically Prussia’s claim to leadership within Germany.”<sup>53</sup> For Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm he drew up a draft of the

<sup>48</sup> Eichmann, 19.2.67, 12.3.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39; Landsberg, 14/15.2.67 (drafts), GStAB, HA I, GsD, IV, A, 29a.

<sup>49</sup> Gise, 17.2.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841; Werner, 11/13/16.2.67, 2.3.67, HHStAV, PAV/35; Crowe, 22.2.67, PRO, FO 68/147.

<sup>50</sup> Historische Reichskommission, ed., *Politik*, 8:360, and for the following quotation from the same letter.

<sup>51</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (1972), ch. 20.

<sup>52</sup> For this section see Klocke, *Politik*; Dickmann, “Bismarck”; Dietrich, “Friedensschluß,” 109ff.; Dietrich, “Preußen,” 273ff.; Becker, *Ringgen*; Philippi, “Verstimmungen”; also Retallack, “To My Loyal Saxons!”

<sup>53</sup> Landsberg, 12.1.67, Eichmann, 12.3.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

policy he hoped to follow: "It cannot be the aim of Prussia's policy to recall the previous injustices Saxony has perpetrated upon us, nor to arrange matters in such a way that the Saxon ego the feelings of the Saxon population are continually stirred up by lasting humiliation and the discord between us becomes eternal... Our policy has to face the future."

Could Saxons face the future too? Eichmann's prognosis was correct: the next three months would be pivotal.

## CROSSROADS

Government leader Richard von Friesen had good reason to seek the support of Saxon Conservatives as long as he remained unsure whether Prussia's annexationist appetite had been sated. In his memoirs Friesen claimed he was pleasantly surprised by the change in Prussia's attitude toward Saxony between September 1866 and year's end.<sup>54</sup> Friesen was less sanguine at the time. In early December he heard from Berlin that the Prussians "want to admit the southern German states only when the North German states have been brought into the desired state of dependence on Prussia."<sup>55</sup> With a policy that was "directed more toward paving the way for a unitary state than for a federal state," Prussia purportedly aimed at nothing less than the "gradual absorption" of Saxony and the other members of the North German Confederation. The same suspicions came to the fore when Saxony's state ministry convened on 22 December 1866, with King Johann in attendance.<sup>56</sup> The ministers agreed that Saxony had to be careful in the constitutional discussions underway in Berlin.<sup>57</sup> King Johann continued to regret that no genuine *Staatenhaus* existed to counterbalance the "democratic" Reichstag. And he was still dissatisfied that the Reichstag did not include a category of deputies chosen by individual state Landtage.<sup>58</sup> But Friesen realized that Bismarck would tolerate no wholesale revisions to the Confederation's draft constitution. Nor did Friesen want Saxony to appear "petty" or "unrepentant" when Prussia needed all the friends it could get.<sup>59</sup>

Relations between Bismarck and Friesen soon became even more fraught. After the Reichstag elections were completed in February 1867, Saxony's envoy in Berlin, Rudolf von Könneritz, reported that Bismarck had remarked "in unmistakable terms" that he would soon be in a position to make policy independent of the new German parliament, once he had "come to an understanding" with the federated governments.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:3–6.

<sup>55</sup> Könneritz to Friesen, 6.12.66, SHStAD, GsB 221; cf. Könneritz to Friesen, 28/30.11.66, 18/19.12.66, SHStAD, MdAA 1029; Könneritz to Friesen, 19.12.66, *ibid.* 1030; Dietrich, "Friedensschluß," 152f.

<sup>56</sup> SHStAD, MdAA 1029, also for 1/4.2.67; GM meetings 13.11.66, 22/28.12.66, 1.2.67, SHStAD, GM, Loc. 75, No. 2 [vol. I].

<sup>57</sup> Gise, 31.12.66, BHStAM II, MA 2841; cf. GStAB, HA III, 2.4.1. I, Nrn. 253–4.

<sup>58</sup> Johann's handwritten memorandum (Dec. 1866), SHStAD, Hausarchiv Johann, Nr. 45.

<sup>59</sup> Friesen to Johann, 3/5/8/12/13/14/19/21.1.67, 6/12.2.67, SHStAD, MdAA 1029–30; Gerber, "Briefen," 225.

<sup>60</sup> Könneritz to Friesen, 13/15.2.67, SHStAD, MdAA 3286 and 1030, respectively.

Friesen remained unconvinced.<sup>61</sup> His need for caution was even more apparent by the time the Reichstag convened on 24 February 1867. Five days earlier, Könneritz reported that Bismarck's hints about a showdown had now taken on the nature of a threat—not against the Reichstag but against Saxony. If Saxony did not toe the line, Prussia intended to achieve its goals with the help of parliament.<sup>62</sup> When Könneritz suggested to Bismarck that Saxony had already compromised as far as possible, Bismarck replied, "You are playing a high-stakes and dangerous game if you separate your interests from ours and force us into a policy that we would rather avoid." Disagreements between Prussia and Saxony on the military agreement being worked out in early February added to the atmosphere of brinkmanship.<sup>63</sup> What were Friesen's thoughts, then, as he set out from Dresden to participate in the opening of the new parliament in Berlin?

We can guess a few of them. How would Saxony's Reichstag delegation conduct itself? Would any unified policy emerge to unite the Saxon particularists? Would the "matadors of the liberal-conservative party" try to form their own caucus?<sup>64</sup> These questions were anything but moot, for relations between Saxony and Prussia hung in the balance, Bismarck was pondering his options to overcome liberal opposition, and German parliamentarism was about to be tested in practice. Listeners would hang on every word spoken by Saxon deputies in the Reichstag. As Saxony's military plenipotentiary in Berlin observed in March, "It is . . . scarcely believable what kind of pettiness provides capital for the mistrust that is nurtured here . . . Every excessive Saxon entreaty, every unconsidered comment, whether by persons distinguished or lowly, is accorded a significance here that one would have to call comical—if only the consequences were not so serious."<sup>65</sup>

When the Reichstag session opened in Berlin, public opinion in Saxony could hardly have been more sour. The announcement of the draft constitution had been received in a mood of "sullen resignation."<sup>66</sup> The distinction between a "federal state" and a "unitary state" still had a powerful effect. A liberal contributor to the *Sächsische Dorfzeitung* could not help noting the incongruity between the "dreamy, magnificent dome" of the 1848 St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt and the Reichstag's temporary quarters in the Prussian Herrenhaus at Leipziger Straße 3—that "bomb-proof, humdrum building where everything is 'royal-Prussian' instead of German-national." Liberals found it inauspicious that the Prussians had "forgotten" to supply the chamber with a speakers' podium.<sup>67</sup>

On a personal level, Saxony's Reichstag deputies were all imprinted in much the same way by their first encounters in Berlin. The Conservative Carl Gerber, no

<sup>61</sup> Friesen to Johann, 14.1.67, cited previously; BWiA, 4:69f.; Werner, 13.2.67, HHStAV, PAV/35; Dickmann, *Beziehungen*, 106f. Cf. Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:320.

<sup>62</sup> Könneritz to Friesen, 15/19.2.67, SHStAD, MdAA 1030; BWiA, 4:69.

<sup>63</sup> Hollyday, *Rival*, 44–57; GM protocols (1/2/21.2.67), SHStAD, MdAA 1029.

<sup>64</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:25ff.; Werner, 2/16.3.67, 20/27.4.67, HHStAV, PAV/35.

<sup>65</sup> Carl von Brandenstein to Fabrice, 6.3.67, SHStAD, SKAD, 2.1, 4474; cf. Gerber, "Briefen," 235f. (2.3.67); SHStAD, MdAA 1031.

<sup>66</sup> Gise, 24.2.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841; Richter, *Meinung*, 80–4.

<sup>67</sup> SDZ, 1.3.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 77; Schwab, "Aufstieg," 1:120.

backwoodsman, was particularly impressed by the glitter of Prussian power and royal wealth: he dutifully sent his wife the printed menu from each of his dinner engagements through February and March.<sup>68</sup> When Gerber first entered the Reichstag, the seats were divided into four groups: Right, Left, Right-Center and Left-Center. Most were already reserved with visiting cards on them. The socialist Bebel and his comrade Schrapf sat on the extreme left of the House—so far on the left, Bebel recalled in his memoirs, that to go any further would simply mean running their heads against the wall.<sup>69</sup>

Division within the ranks of Saxon Conservatives soon became apparent. This frustrated Friesen's attempt to induce them to vote *en bloc* for the constitution. Friesen and Könneritz acted rather like parliamentary whips in Berlin: they herded the Saxons to the Reichstag each day, dispensed advice, and tried to prevent social or political missteps. They believed this frantic activity would pay off if they could hold together the Saxon delegation for the vote on the constitution. The Prussians had insinuated that if they did so, Prussian troops would soon be removed from Saxony. This "insinuation" was an open secret. The military accord between the two states stipulated that Prussian troops would leave Saxony by 1 July 1867 only if reform of the Saxon army along Prussian lines had proceeded as planned *and* if the North German Confederation's new constitution came into effect by that date. The Prussian troops in Saxony were a "Sword of Damocles . . . held over the Saxon government."<sup>70</sup>

No one in Berlin was looking for favors from the Saxons. "We Saxons are isolated and in a sad way; no one pays any attention to us," wrote Gerber, though he admitted that they won few friends by "sniffing around" the different caucuses so long. Eventually some Conservatives joined the Federalist-Constitutionalist Union that included Hanoverian particularists. But for others, the only remaining possibility in this "crazy" party spectrum was to join the Old Liberals, the Free Conservatives, or no caucus at all. By the middle of March 1867 most of the Saxon Conservative deputies had chosen one of these options. This did not prevent Gerber's embarrassment as his colleagues delivered parochial speeches with "laughable particularist self-conceit."<sup>71</sup> When the constitution was finally approved on 16 April 1867, the Saxon delegation split down the middle, voting 11:10 in favor, with two deputies absent. Saxon deputies in Berlin were neither influential enough to defend their kingdom's interests nor united enough to win real gratitude from Bismarck. Gerber did not abandon his suspicions about universal suffrage and the Reichstag's growing power. But he recognized the danger of carrying anti-Prussian rhetoric too far: "Our Saxon interests are now guaranteed only by the Prussian government, not in parliament."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Gerber, "Briefen," 229f.; cf. Blum, *Bismarck*, 4:36; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 160.

<sup>69</sup> BAmL, 168f.

<sup>70</sup> Gise, 5.3.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841.

<sup>71</sup> Gerber to his wife, 13.3.67, SHStAD, NL Gerber, 340.

<sup>72</sup> Gerber, "Briefen," 243 (4.3.67); cf. Brandenstein to Fabrice, 9.3.67, SHStAD, SKAD, 2.1. 4474.

THE REICHSTAG ELECTIONS OF AUGUST 1867

The necessity of politicking for unattainable goals contributed to the decision of many Saxon deputies not to stand for re-election on 31 August 1867. Only thirteen of the twenty-three Saxon deputies were re-nominated and re-elected in August. This helped the National Liberals stage a comeback. With the North German Confederation now firmly in the saddle, they no longer had to bear the odium of being identified exclusively with Prussian ambitions.<sup>73</sup>

A number of Saxon democrats had been so disappointed by the outcome in February that they favored an election boycott.<sup>74</sup> The Lassallean socialists, now split into two antagonistic groups, also nursed the defeats of February, whereas Bebel and Liebknecht went to work mobilizing their supporters. A conference in July 1867 paved the way for the nomination of Bebel, Liebknecht, Schrap, and Ferdinand Goetz, a physician and leader of the gymnastic movement.<sup>75</sup> For the August campaign the Conservatives' *Wahlcomité* was reconstituted as the Constitutional-Federalist Electoral Association for Saxony. Its profile was murky and its activity spare.<sup>76</sup> The Conservative campaign was also hampered by the timing of the election: some potential Conservative voters were busy with the late-summer harvest, others were holidaying away from home.<sup>77</sup> Only the National Liberals had the wind at their back. They drew strength from passage of the constitution, from Bismarck's saber-rattling with France over Luxemburg, and from the establishment of a nationwide party. The National Liberal Party's program of 12 June 1867 emphasized that liberty and unity had to be achieved together.<sup>78</sup>

Attempts by the Saxon government to influence the election outcome were unsystematic and of doubtful value. The National Liberal Hans Blum—son of the 1848 martyr Robert Blum—complained in his memoirs about his opponent's effort to mobilize "the entire civil service, right down to the last gendarme," in 15: Mittweida.<sup>79</sup> Blum faced Baron Leonçe Robert von Könneritz—district governor of Chemnitz, Beust's son-in-law, and Saxony's future minister of finance.<sup>80</sup> According to Blum the Saxon government delayed scheduling the run-off ballot in order to give local authorities more time to influence voters. But in and around Chemnitz, Blum's party colleagues steered close to the line of electoral impropriety themselves. Two petitions submitted to the Reichstag after the election claimed that employers had used threats and inducements to prevent workers from voting or had simply

<sup>73</sup> Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:334–6; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 259–81; Pollmann, "Arbeiterwahlen"; Steinbach, *Zählung*, 1:149–98.

<sup>74</sup> BAml, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:214–18; Heilmann, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 37f.

<sup>76</sup> Könneritz to Friesen, 4.8.67, SHStAD, GsB 221; MdI Nostitz-Wallwitz to Albert Weinlig, 19.8.67, cited in Moltke/Stieda, *Weinlig*, 519f.; Eichmann, 25.8.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

<sup>77</sup> *DN*, 19.8.67, *LZ*, 13/17.8.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 84f.; Zehmen, *Erläuterungen*; Cons. manifesto in Schröder, "Genese," 156; cf. Fuchs, "Wigard," 2:184f.

<sup>78</sup> NLP, *Kundgebungen*; Schwab, "Aufstieg," 1:143–54, 2:7–8. See "National Liberal Party, Founding Program (12 June 1867)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=684](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=684).

<sup>79</sup> Blum, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1:266.

<sup>80</sup> AHM Chemnitz 1864–74; KHM Zwickau 1874–5; KHM Leipzig 1876; Mdf 1876–1890.

Table 2.2. Party Caucuses in the North German Reichstag, February and August 1867

Party	12 February 1867		31 August 1867	
	North German Confederation	Saxony	North German Confederation	Saxony
Conservatives	66	14 (0)	70	8 (0)
Free Conservatives	39	0 (3)	36	0 (3)
Old Liberals	28	0 (7)	15	0 (0)
National Liberals	81	0 (0)	84	4 (4)
Progressives	20	7 (7)	30	6 (6)
Free Unionists	13	0 (0)	13	0 (0)
Social Democrats	2	2 (2)	6	5 (4)
Federal Constitutionalists	20	0 (1)	20	0 (5)
Poles/Danes	15	0 (0)	12	0 (0)
Independents	13	0 (3)	9	0 (1)
Total	297	23 (23)	297	23 (23)

*Notes:* Contemporaries ascribed the party affiliations shown above to candidates during the election campaign; figures in parentheses (from Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*) reflect the situation after formation of loose party caucuses.

*Sources:* Compiled by the author from Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 545, and other sources.

refused employees time off to vote. (Election day, a Saturday, was not a holiday for most workers.) Both petitions came from working-class voters in areas of Saxony dominated by National Liberal entrepreneurs.<sup>81</sup>

The fall-off in voter participation between February and August 1867 was pronounced: turnout in Saxony sank to about 30 percent.<sup>82</sup> The political complexion of Saxony's Reichstag delegation changed significantly, as shown in Table 2.2.

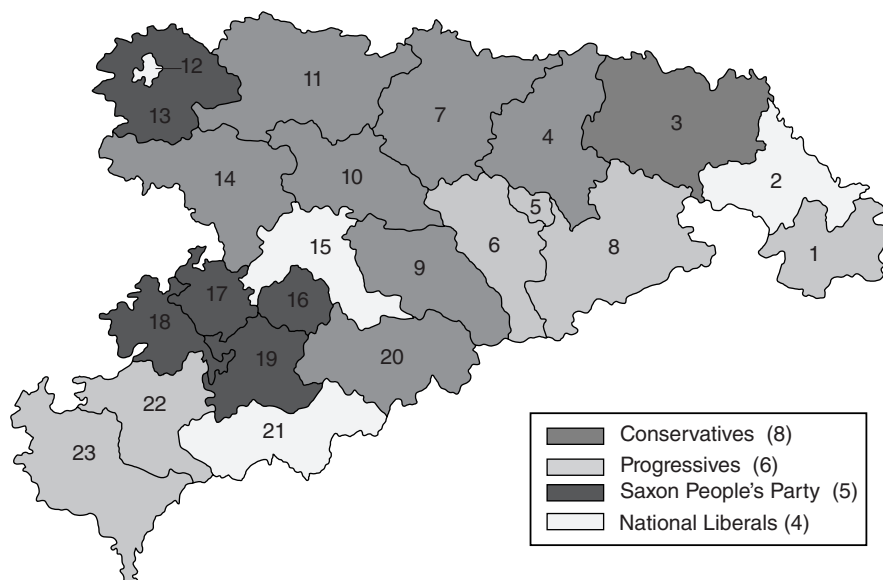
The Conservatives lost ground heavily to the Left. Whereas the National Liberals had failed to elect a single deputy in February, they now elected four, and they increased their state-wide vote from about 10,000 to about 25,000 votes. Compared with their 3 percent share in February, the National Liberals won almost 17 percent of the vote in Saxony. Whereas the socialists had elected just two deputies in February, they now elected five. These included the Lassallean Emil Försterling in 16: Chemnitz and Wilhelm Liebknecht in 19: Stollberg. According to Bebel, the 1867 Reichstag elections "excited the masses in a manner never seen since the year 1848."<sup>83</sup> Hatred of Prussia had not dominated the campaign this time around. Nevertheless, nineteen Saxon deputies still opposed the North German Confederation on principle (see Map 2.3).

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<sup>81</sup> *SBDR Anl* 1867, 2:236, Nr. 154 (XV), 4 (21.10.67); BAP, RKA 1431, Bd. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Hamerow, *Foundations*, 2:334f.; Pollmann, *Parlamentarismus*, 277ff.; LZ, 10.9.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 87; Hofmann, "Arbeiterbewegung," 88f., 187.

<sup>83</sup> Fischer, *Bebel*; also Hofmann, "Arbeiterbewegung," 155–222, esp. 170; Leidigkeit, *Liebknecht*, 110.



**Map 2.3.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony, 31 August 1867. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. Drawn by the author.

The Saxon government and the Conservatives were unsettled by the National Liberals' gains in August 1867—more so than by the Social Democrats' advance. In December 1867, government leader Friesen met the Prussian envoy Eichmann. Their conversation was obviously an awkward one. Why, asked Eichmann, did Friesen's government regard the only Saxon newspapers that displayed any "warmth" for Prussia as part of the opposition?<sup>84</sup> Before Friesen could answer, Eichmann posed a follow-up question: Why could the Saxon government not work more closely with the National Liberals? To understand Friesen's reply we must refer to his memoirs (1880) without, however, imagining they were candid. There, Friesen argued that the Saxon government always sought the middle path. It tried, on the one hand, to avoid making concessions to Saxon National Liberals, who allegedly sought to disrupt relations between Saxony and Prussia in the hope of prompting an outright annexation of Saxon territory. The Saxon people, Friesen wrote, felt a "justified bitterness" toward them. On the other hand, he claimed that his government refused to favor the Conservatives' negative particularism.<sup>85</sup> In his December 1867 conversation with Eichmann, Friesen offered a different viewpoint. He drew a sharp contrast between National Liberalism in Prussia and in Saxony. In Prussia, the National Liberals constituted a "large middle party": they united the "best talents" with "great political influence." In Saxony, they

<sup>84</sup> For the following, Eichmann, 18.12.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

<sup>85</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:335–58, 3:18, 97–9; cf. PAAAB, Sachsen 49; Flathe, "Memoiren."



constituted only “a few persons who for purely personal motives continue to oppose the government without having the support of the public at large.” With a note of regret, Friesen then told Eichmann that Saxon Conservatives lacked both the energy and the necessary organization to support the government adequately. His ministry had “simply not had the time to direct its special attention to this matter.” But in the future, “much will have to change in Saxony’s press and party relationships.”

At that point Eichmann broke off the conversation. Had he continued, he intended to tell Friesen “that the organization of the Conservative Party in Saxony is presently comprised only of civil servants.” Eichmann felt that those officials were accommodating themselves too slowly to the fact that the North German Confederation might be something more than a necessary evil—and a temporary one at that. If this attitude persisted, Eichmann believed, the Conservative Party would be forced to “leave the representation of the national idea to their opponents.” In new political circumstances, “political resignation alone, which the Conservatives have so far pinned to their mast, will not likely succeed.”

## THE LANDTAG SUFFRAGE REFORM OF 1868

This Saxon agitation [for Landtag suffrage reform] is the prelude to change throughout the whole of Germany . . . The German press . . . points out the anomaly of universal suffrage and a single parliament [the Reichstag] being enforced for the whole whilst restricted suffrages and dual chambers govern the parts.

—British Consul Joseph Archer Crowe to the British  
Foreign Office, February 1867<sup>86</sup>

Nouns of number, or multitude, such as Mob, Parliament, Rabble, House of Commons, Regiment, Court of King’s Bench, Den of Thieves, and the like.

—William Cobbett, 1817<sup>87</sup>

Reform of Saxony’s parliamentary suffrage was endorsed by Friesen’s government in November 1866 and carried through in May 1868. It was intended to defuse public dissatisfaction with minor reforms that had been implemented earlier in the decade.<sup>88</sup> It was also a preemptive strike against Progressives and Social Democrats, who demanded a return to the direct and equal Landtag suffrage of 15 November 1848 or the Frankfurt Parliament’s universal suffrage of 1849. The reform of 1868, like Bismarck’s introduction of universal manhood suffrage, rested on a set of theoretical

<sup>86</sup> Report (Leipzig), 7.2.67, PRO, FO 68/147.

<sup>87</sup> English political reformer and radical journalist. Cobbett, *English Grammar* (1817), letter 17, “Syntax as Relating to Pronouns.”

<sup>88</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5370–1; Schimmel, *Entwicklung*, 79–87. GM protocols cited in this section in SHStAD, Mdl 5372. Cf. Müller, “Wahlrecht,” sec. 4.3; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 94–108. I examined this suffrage reform in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 5.

and practical assumptions that already had their own pre-histories. And like Bismarck's strategy, Saxony's suffrage reform can be considered either conservative or revolutionary, depending whether we want to stress continuity or rupture.

Friesen's ministry and Saxon liberals agreed that a more vigorous state parliament, based on a new suffrage, would better represent the people's will and provide new legitimacy for the Saxon state. A liberal member of the lower house underscored this consensus when he declared that "the call for reform of our constitution and of our suffrage is no longer a demand voiced merely by one political party in the land" but was rooted in the "compelling needs of the age."<sup>89</sup> Even Saxony's most conservative state minister declared that suffrage reform must "take account of new circumstances."<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, when Saxon deputies got down to the business of enfranchising some of their countrymen and excluding others, consensus evaporated. Where did participants in the suffrage reform debate draw the line between political insiders and outsiders? How did Saxons see the relationship between their own parliament and others in Germany? Why did the Landtag suffrage issue become the lens through which all other Saxon efforts at political reform and retrenchment were viewed?

#### AGENDAS FOR REFORM

In 1866, agitation for suffrage reform in Saxony paralleled agitation for a national parliament. After Bismarck introduced his proposal for a national assembly in April 1866, Beust barely managed to avoid a full-blown discussion of Saxon suffrage reform in the Landtag debates of May and June. When the Landtag was convened in November 1866 to approve the new Reichstag suffrage, the deficiencies of the Saxon suffrage again came up for debate.<sup>91</sup> A few months later, in the Constituent North German Reichstag sat two Saxon Conservatives, Ludwig Zehmen and Carl Gerber, who feared that voting in national elections would be dominated by "young Berlin editors pressing themselves upon their voters" or "200–300 book-printers and cigar-makers."<sup>92</sup> And after Saxony's National Liberals rebounded in the Reichstag elections of 31 August 1867, they grew more confident that Saxony's suffrage could no longer withstand the force of change at the national level.

In September 1867 members of the Reichstag discussed the fact that the individual states belonging to the North German Confederation had widely differing voting regulations.<sup>93</sup> This debate led to a motion asking Bismarck's government to begin work immediately on a comprehensive voting law for the North German Reichstag, which was finally passed on 31 May 1869—only four days before Saxony's suffrage reform of 1868 was first tested in practice. In the meantime Saxony's municipal parliaments had also begun to consider reforming their own

<sup>89</sup> *LTMitt* 1866/68, II.K., 3:2636f. (Heinrich Theodor Koch, 23.3.68).

<sup>90</sup> Minister of Culture Johann von Falkenstein, cited in acting envoy Alvensleben to Pr. FO, 18.10.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

<sup>91</sup> SHStAD, LT 5950, for debates in the II.K. (26–29.11.66) and the following week in the I.K.

<sup>92</sup> *SBDR* 1:420 (Zehmen, 28.3.67); Gerber to his wife, 30.3.67, SHStAD, NL Gerber, 340.

<sup>93</sup> BAP, RKA 1431.

election laws.<sup>94</sup> And suffrage reform debates were unfolding in other lands.<sup>95</sup> We must appreciate that between 1867 and 1869, no one could be sure that universal manhood suffrage for the Reichstag was permanently fixed. As for the Prussian House of Deputies, some Germans thought it might evolve into an upper chamber for the North German Confederation. Others thought it would be reformed in the direction of universal suffrage—or disappear altogether.<sup>96</sup>

Passage of Saxony's suffrage law of 1868 unfolded as a three-act drama. The government's principal spokesmen, Richard von Friesen and Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz, were stage managers: they successfully bridged the all-or-nothing positions adopted by die-hards on the left and right. Act I unfolded between September and December 1866. It began when Friesen, then in Berlin, wrote that political reform at home was unstoppable.<sup>97</sup> "[Saxony's] entry into the North German Confederation has to have a decisive influence upon our constitutional system; next to a federal parliament elected under universal suffrage, a Landtag based on the principle of occupational estates cannot exist." This anomaly was all the more egregious, Friesen wrote, because Saxon democrats were still protesting Beust's unconstitutional reactivation of the Landtag in 1850. Yet Friesen was hardly thinking of dismantling the Saxon Landtag. At this juncture he was trying to ensure that the Saxon Landtag *not* become redundant. By holding Landtag elections as scheduled in the autumn of 1866, Friesen hoped Saxons would see him as the determined defender of their interests. His hopes were misplaced. These elections convinced no one that Saxony's sovereignty remained fully intact. Public interest could hardly have been lower.<sup>98</sup> When political pundits tried to explain why voters were so apathetic, they did not have far to look. Compared to the Reichstag suffrage, Saxony's seemed more anachronistic than ever.

The Saxon Left did not hesitate to exploit this situation. On 22 October 1866, Progressive and Social Democratic leaders organized a large rally to demand suffrage reform. Another meeting followed on 12 November. Both groups favored abolishing the Saxon House of Lords. However, disagreement arose on other issues. Socialists and left-wing Progressives demanded nothing less than universal suffrage. For them, "the '48 suffrage [was] far from democratic enough."<sup>99</sup> Almost everyone on the left was determined to overturn the "rusty principle" of representation according to social estates. In a pamphlet published anonymously in November 1866, Karl Biedermann asked, "Is the common weal of the individual

<sup>94</sup> E.g. resolutions passed in Dresden, 2.11.67, 6.12.67, StAD, 2.3.5, I–7, Nr. 1; *LTAkten*, 17.11.67.

<sup>95</sup> Besides Mattmüller, "Durchsetzung," see Vogel/Nohlen/Schultze, *Wahlen*, Tables GII–GIV; Nohlen, *Wahlrecht*, esp. 33ff.; Ehrle, *Volksvertretung*; Meyer, *Wahlrecht*; Diederich, *Wahlstatistik*; Huber, *Verfassungsgeschichte*, 3:182–223; Tödter, "Klassenwahlrechte"; Niehuss, "Configurations"; Lehnert, *Institutionen*; Steinbach, *Probleme*; Kohl, "Entwicklung"; Ritter, "Repräsentation."

<sup>96</sup> See Pollmann's and other contributions to Ritter, *Regierung*; Brandt, *Parlamentarismus*, 170; Ritter, *Wahlen*.

<sup>97</sup> Friesen to Falkenstein, 15.9.66, Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:288; cf. *ibid.* 3:46f.

<sup>98</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5371; Borrmann, "Arbeiterbewegung," 89–94, 200; Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 80–3.

<sup>99</sup> *DN*, 14.11.66.

state not inextricably linked to that of the Confederation? Can this larger body tolerate a diseased limb?"<sup>100</sup>

The Landtag debates of November–December 1866 set the parameters for subsequent discussion of suffrage reform. The throne speech of 15 November signaled that the government was not prepared to submit a reform bill until the constitution and parliamentary suffrage of the North German Confederation had been clarified.<sup>101</sup> The advocates of suffrage reform were so disappointed that a contentious debate ensued on the first day of the session. Two liberal motions called for immediate action or at least a clear statement of principle. The more radical of these motions was supported by sixteen liberal deputies in the lower house. It advocated the dissolution of the Landtag and the holding of new elections based on Saxony's suffrage law of 15 November 1848. This motion was introduced by the chairman of the Chemnitz city council and newly-elected Landtag deputy, Bernhard Eisenstuck, who, in the course of defending his motion, spoke of the "wretchedness and misfortune" that afflicted the Saxon Landtag during the Beust era. Eisenstuck also addressed the "glaring" discrepancy between the Landtag and Reichstag suffrages, which "screamed" for immediate redress.<sup>102</sup> The second motion was sponsored by a small-town lawyer from the Erzgebirge, Heinrich Theodor Koch, who stressed the need to foster "reconciliation outward on a national basis, reconciliation inward on a liberal one." The main point of his motion was to address "the legitimate wishes of the people for a progressive widening of the threshold for the active and passive suffrage, and for a more up-to-date composition of parliament." The same point of view was expressed by a new member for Leipzig, "Political wisdom dictates that one have a hand on the pulse of the times."<sup>103</sup>

When Eisenstuck's motion was roundly defeated (57:18), its sponsor wondered whether the Saxon Landtag (and particularly its upper house) could ever reform itself.<sup>104</sup> The second motion elicited more animated debate. The Conservative response was offered by Raimund Sachße—a Conservative who would soon win the Reichstag seat for 9: Freiberg. (Sachße's influence is noteworthy because he was one of few Jews to achieve prominence in Conservative circles.)<sup>105</sup> Sachße refused to concede that Saxony's suffrage should be shaped by national developments: the legislative prerogatives of the Reichstag and individual Landtage had to be very different. Sachße also rejected Eisenstuck's complaint that no liberals had been appointed to the Landtag committee formed to debate the suffrage bill. Only those deputies had been considered for committee membership, Sachße proclaimed, who sat in the house with "unsullied hands"—namely, those "who, while the land was

<sup>100</sup> [Biedermann], *Stände*, 14f.

<sup>101</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, I.K., 1:8f. (15.11.66); II.K., 1:7–9 (16.11.66); for relevant committee minutes, stenographic reports, petitions, resolutions, and brochures, SHStAD, LT, Nrn. 5780–1, 5904, 5948–50, and GM Loc. 63 Nr. 4. The government's *Dekret* No. 77 (19.11.67) and the LT's *Ständige Schrift* No. 172 (28.5.68) in *LT Akten* 1866/68, I. Abt., Bde. 3–4. Final law (3.12.68) in *GVbl* (1868), 2:1365–78.

<sup>102</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 1:3–6 (16.11.66).

<sup>103</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 1:11 (Koch, 16.11.66), 98 (Karl Otto Müller, 6.12.66).

<sup>104</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 1:94f. (Theodor Günther), 102f. (Eisenstuck, 6.12.66).

<sup>105</sup> Schimmel, *Entwicklung*, 90–2, refers to him as the LT's "eternal Jew."

suffering under the fist of the enemy, had not had the audacity to attack the government in those newspapers that celebrated orgies of annexationism."<sup>106</sup>

When the upper chamber took up the debate a few days later, one conservative estate owner argued that Koch's motion was "not as harmless as it appears," even when contrasted with Eisenstuck's. What exactly is "up-to-date?" he asked, and what are the "legitimate wishes" of the Saxon people?<sup>107</sup> Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz, younger brother of the interior minister, also opposed the plan to "adapt" Saxony's suffrage to the North German Confederation. He predicted that individual Landtage would soon be reduced to "mere provincial parliaments." Rather than concerning themselves with great national issues, these parliaments would focus their attention on "questions of practical importance." When Meißen's conservative mayor Karl Richard Hirschberg joined the fray, he claimed that the current flood of pamphlets and public meetings in Saxony had fallen short of educating the common man sufficiently for him to exercise his vote. Occasionally and on an exceptional basis, Hirschberg told the house, popular assemblies might be elected on the basis of universal suffrage; such assemblies could function as "safety valves" to release dangerous political pressures. Alternatively, universal suffrage could be inaugurated for local county assemblies; they might then elect a Landtag, which in turn could vote for Reichstag deputies. The main point was to prevent "passions" and "impure motives" from infecting voting at all three tiers of politics.<sup>108</sup>

These debates yielded no consensus on the future shape of suffrage reform.<sup>109</sup> Neither did the flurry of petitions organized by Progressives and Social Democrats. As editor of the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Heinrich von Treitschke rejected an essay on Saxon suffrage reform around the same time. He wrote that "it is of no consequence whatsoever which suffrage is preserved for the ruins of the Confederation of the Rhine . . . How the Albertiner want to patch up their dilapidated throne is their own affair; the patriot must pray that they fail."<sup>110</sup> Treitschke may have changed his mind, for the *Preußische Jahrbücher* soon printed an anonymous essay that mirrored the rhetoric and chauvinism so characteristic of Treitschke's other writing.<sup>111</sup> Arguing that Saxon suffrage reform was the *sine qua non* for further reforms in state and society, this text provided a picture of Saxony's future if its "worm-eaten" suffrage could be reformed: "Freely elected representatives of the people will prevail over the sort of cranky particularism that so contemptuously abuses the name of patriotism . . . Individuals and parties must . . . learn to demonstrate manly courage and resolution . . . Into their all-too-soft, pliant, and submissive Saxon natures they must bring some steel."<sup>112</sup> The Conservative leader Ludwig von Zehmen attacked universal suffrage with a different argument. It was a "dice-game," he wrote, which would replace the educated middle classes in parliament

<sup>106</sup> *DN*, 8.12.66; *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 1:112 (6.12.66).

<sup>107</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, I.K., 1:83 (20.12.66).

<sup>108</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, I.K., Bd. 1, 84f. (Nostitz-Wallwitz), 87f. (Hirschberg) (20.12.66).

<sup>109</sup> *DN*, 4/5/6/8.12.66; *SHStAD*, MdI, Nr. 11039.

<sup>110</sup> Cited (n.d.) in Kretzschmar, "Verhältnis," 260.

<sup>111</sup> *Sächsische Dorfzeitung*, 21.6.67, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 121.

<sup>112</sup> *PrJbb* 20 (1867): 195–215, here 215.

with “political dead-beats in tattered coat-tails.” Anyone who still advocated a “head-count” system was “fit for the nut-house.”<sup>113</sup>

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Did these pronouncements significantly influence Friesen, Nostitz-Wallwitz, and their ministerial colleagues as the second act of the suffrage reform drama began, running from June to November 1867? The minutes of state ministry meetings and the memoranda drawn up by the ministers leave no doubt on this score.<sup>114</sup> Reform could not be avoided altogether. In December 1866 Interior Minister Nostitz had claimed—as his exit line in Act I—that the new constitution of the North German Confederation would have no direct implications for the individual states and their suffrage laws.<sup>115</sup> He nonetheless conceded that it was pointless to deny the *indirect* impact of recent events on Saxony’s political institutions:

When a number of tenants live together in a large house, certainly each one has the right to furnish his own room according to his tastes. But in doing so he will have to take into account certain structural features of the building, and if he is to live in peace with his fellow lodgers, he cannot prevent their customs and habits from influencing his own. I believe that in many respects we find ourselves in a similar relationship to the federal constitution.

Nostitz also rebutted the charge that the current Landtag represented only privileged estates. Saxony’s Landtag, he declared, was more representative than the English parliament, which at that point was pondering Disraeli’s Second Reform Act, and the Belgian parliament, where a tax threshold of approximately eleven Thaler (thirty-three Marks) was patently undemocratic. To bolster his argument, Nostitz observed that universal suffrage was a rarity in German constitutions: most were based on tax thresholds, local residency requirements, or the three-class system of voting as in Prussia.

Nostitz realized that only a compromise bill had any hope of passing both houses of Saxony’s parliament. It would have to incorporate liberal and conservative demands and give due attention to national, state-level, and local circumstances. Nostitz sent his fellow ministers a memorandum on 29 June 1867 that outlined his ideas. Friesen did likewise in early September.<sup>116</sup> By and large Nostitz and Friesen saw eye-to-eye with each other and with deputies drawn from the moderate wings of the liberal and conservative camps.<sup>117</sup> They had to close their ears to the chorus of discontent outside parliament. But that clamor grew louder when the government’s draft bill was introduced on 19 November 1867.

The liberals’ rejuvenated reform campaign gained momentum with a suddenness that startled the government and foreign observers alike. “A powerful party in

<sup>113</sup> Zehmen, *Erläuterungen*, 16–19.

<sup>114</sup> GM meetings of 27.9.67, 5.11.67, 14.11.67, 23.2.68, 26.3.68 and “Motiven,” SHStAD, Mdl 5372 and GM, Loc. 63, Nr. 4; cf. Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:46ff.

<sup>115</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 1:110f. (6.12.66); *DN*, 8.12.66.

<sup>116</sup> Ministers’ *Vota* cited in Müller, “Wahlrecht,” sec. 4.3.

<sup>117</sup> “Motiven,” *LT Akten*, 1866/68, I. Abt., 3:170–82; other materials in SHStAD, LT 5904, 5948.

Germany favors the absorption of all legislative power into this body [the Reichstag],” wrote Joseph Crowe hopefully from Leipzig, “by gradually degrading the old chambers to the rank of provincial assemblies.” Crowe believed the first step in this direction “would be the assimilation of the electoral laws in kingdoms and principalities to that of the federation.”<sup>118</sup> Petitions sent to the Landtag by “people’s assemblies” and “people’s associations” from early November through late December 1867 stressed that Saxony’s future suffrage must transform the Landtag into a “true people’s parliament.” Many favored the general, direct, and secret suffrage.<sup>119</sup> They supported the payment of per diem allowances to Landtag deputies. And they advocated the extension of universal manhood suffrage to local elections. One petition circulated at a large assembly in Zwickau, allegedly attended by some 900 persons, protested against the National Liberals’ “un-national and un-liberal conduct.” This was an allusion to the efforts of Hans Blum and others to have the Reichstag intervene in Saxony’s own “constitutional conflict,” as liberals in Mecklenburg had already proposed for their own state.<sup>120</sup>

Conservative voices were more muted. The Patriotic Association in Leipzig petitioned the Landtag to oppose public calls for the universal suffrage, to preserve distinctions between urban and rural constituencies, and to retain the House of Lords. Stressing that it represented “the most respected of Leipzig’s burghers,” it argued that a suffrage without a tax threshold would introduce the “unacceptable” principle of “representation according to a purely numerical head-count of the population.”<sup>121</sup> Government leader Friesen actively orchestrated statements of Conservative support, not only from political clubs like the Leipzig one but also from agricultural associations and rural town councils. Friesen and his interior minister were not trying to mobilize Conservative die-hards. Nostitz complained on the floor of the Landtag that “patriotic men” and other “devoted friends” had been criticizing the government directly or indirectly for the “dangerous path” it had charted in the suffrage reform debate.<sup>122</sup> He had little patience for such apocalyptic rhetoric. Moreover, Friesen had been favorably impressed by the pace of reform in Berlin. After a trip there in October 1867, he likened Germany’s new national parliament to an engine of legislation, roaring ahead as if powered by the age of steam itself. He nevertheless entertained doubts about whether the “hurry and haste” evident in Berlin were entirely prudent.<sup>123</sup> He therefore prepared for the coming legislative battle by taking on the mantle of the reformist conservative—not unlike Benjamin Disraeli in Britain or Sir John A. Macdonald in Canada.

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<sup>118</sup> Crowe, 2.12.67, PRO, FO 68/147; cf. Gise, 3/18.11.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841; CZ, 26/30.11.67, 10.12.67; LTA, 9/16/22.11.67; CZ, 21.11.67; Gb 26, 2. Sem. (1868): 2:481.

<sup>119</sup> For petitions and proposals too numerous to list, SHStAD, LT 5948, and Mdl 5372.

<sup>120</sup> LTA, 30.11.67; Hamerow, *Struggles*, 2:312; Botzenhart, “Staatsbankrott,” 375–8; Grohs, *Reichspartei*, 101f.

<sup>121</sup> Petition (16.12.67), SHStAD, LT 5948; LTA, 17.11.67.

<sup>122</sup> LTMitt 1866/68, II.K., 3:2653 (23.3.68). <sup>123</sup> Gise, 3.11.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841.

The preamble to the government's suffrage reform bill raised the curtain on Act III. It rehearsed Nostitz's remarks from a year earlier. Whereas the areas of jurisdiction of the Reichstag and individual Landtage were clearly separate, both parliaments necessarily "influenced and complemented" each other. Therefore it was "advisable" that the two parliaments not differ too greatly in their composition. Yet to those liberals who advocated abolishing Saxony's upper house, the government responded with a flat refusal. Its two-chamber system gave Saxony's "national institutions the character of an independent state organism."<sup>124</sup> The government's bill also mirrored the Reichstag suffrage by restricting the active suffrage to voters aged twenty-five years and older.

Beyond this point the logic of the Reichstag suffrage could not be endorsed. The preamble noted that each tier of government required its own suffrage. The distance between national and local affairs was so great, and the issues debated in each forum so different, that the Social Democrats' call for the reform of municipal suffrage laws could not be considered. The Landtag suffrage had to be "prudent" and "appropriate." Rather than giving a voice to all citizens of the North German Confederation, as the Reichstag suffrage did, it had to enfranchise tax-payers and property-owners who—*ipso facto*—held a continuing interest in the well-being of their smaller homeland by virtue of their standing in local (not national) society.<sup>125</sup> Using language calculated to hide the conservative fist in the liberal glove, the government concluded that universal suffrage could not be extended to Landtag voting:

The more universal in nature interests represented in the Reichstag have become . . . the wider it has been possible to set the limits of voting rights for Reichstag elections. By contrast, the main tasks of the Landtage in individual federal states will continue to lie in the conscientious overseeing of the state budget and the prudent improvement of existing society and its institutions. Therefore the prerequisites for attaining the right to vote will be different . . . Only those persons can be included whose status as burghers allows one to assume that they demonstrate the necessary concern for the tasks at hand.

The government's bill presented a comprehensive suffrage reform package that can be summarized under four points. First, the system of two-stage (indirect) election was to be replaced by direct voting for parliamentary candidates. The preamble allowed for "no doubt" that the more direct procedure "expresses the will of the voters more completely and with less falsification" than a system involving the selection of delegates and then deputies. (Nostitz and Friesen had previously endorsed the soundness of Bismarck's thinking on this score.) Second, a moderate tax threshold, known as a *Zensus* or *Census*, would restrict Saxon voters to those who owned a house or paid a certain annual amount in state taxes. As originally proposed in the government's bill, Saxon citizens paying at least two Thaler

<sup>124</sup> "Motiven," 172, and 174f. for the following.

<sup>125</sup> Nostitz hinted that future reform might align the suffrages for local councils and the Landtag; *LTMit* 1866/68, I.K., 2:1571 (17.4.68).



(six Marks) would be eligible to vote, while those paying at least ten Thaler (thirty Marks) could stand for election. The threshold for the active suffrage was soon reduced in committee from two to one Thaler. Third, the government abandoned the stipulation that candidates must run in their home constituency—the so-called *Bezirkszwang*, long a target of liberal attacks. This meant that candidates need not have personal ties to the constituency in which they ran. Fourth, the number of deputies in the lower house would remain unchanged at eighty. But instead of designating deputies as representatives of large landowners or industrial circles, as under the estate-bound suffrage of 1831, now forty-five deputies would represent rural districts and thirty-five urban ones—twenty-four for towns and eleven for Saxony's big cities.

Saxony's state ministers found it difficult to concede that representation according to social estates was no longer "up to date." The bill retained the distinction between rural and urban voters.<sup>126</sup> The new British envoy in Dresden, J. Hume Burnley, noted that the forty-five deputies to be elected in the countryside corresponded exactly to the number of estate owners and farmers elected under the estate-bound suffrage. Conversely, the thirty-five deputies to be elected in towns and cities corresponded exactly to the number of representatives drawn previously from the cities and from industrial and commercial circles. A skeptic might claim that Burnley was insufficiently attuned to the fine distinction between representing "estates" and "classes" in parliament. However, Friesen had previously written that a division of Saxony's Landtag seats between urban and rural constituencies was "the only distinction" that could be made among Saxons' "various ways of life and interests."<sup>127</sup> Hence Burnley reported to London that "the fundamental principle that every class interest shall be represented has, in all material points, been adhered to."<sup>128</sup> Jews would no longer be excluded from participating in Landtag elections; but otherwise the changes inaugurated by Saxony's suffrage reform were (in Burnley's view) "not numerous."

A number of stipulations in the draft legislation signaled the Saxon government's willingness to change with the times. Each house of the Landtag was now empowered to examine the propriety of its own members' election. Each could respond as it saw fit to charges of electoral malfeasance. And the grounds on which voters or candidates could be excluded from the electoral process were considerably narrowed. The government's bill nonetheless preserved conservative elements of the existing suffrage or established new ones. Some of these deserve special mention. One was the rolling renewal of the House of Deputies. After 1868, deputies sat for three two-year legislative periods: after each period, only one-third of the Landtag seats were contested. The government also had no intention of abolishing the upper house or significantly changing its composition.

<sup>126</sup> Fricker, *Verfassungsgesetze*, 65; cf. Schimmel, *Entwicklung*, 87; Diersch, *Entwicklung*, 146–77, esp. 150.

<sup>127</sup> Friesen *Votum* of Sept. 1867, in Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. 4.3.

<sup>128</sup> British envoy to Saxony, J. Hume Burnley, to British FO, 26.2.68, PRO, FO 68/149.

One of the most important elements of the government's reform bill proposed forming those twenty-four constituencies for Saxon towns from far-flung communities. Each such district was to include about 30,000 inhabitants (and thus about 3,000 enfranchised voters).<sup>129</sup> The example of the fifth urban district (Dippoldiswalde), lying southwest of Dresden, is illustrative. Its population of 24,063 inhabitants (1867) lived in no fewer than fifteen towns and villages lying up to fifty kilometers apart. A map of such urban ridings shows them floating like islands in (or above) a sea of rural constituencies, with nothing but imaginary lines tying them together.<sup>130</sup> Rural constituencies, as in the case of the twenty-second rural district (Taucha), might include as many as 132 localities. Voters in both kinds of constituency proved susceptible to conservative influence—just as the government intended. In contrast to the situation in Prussia, the relatively underdeveloped network of local liberal associations was inadequate to organize a coherent campaign involving communication and travel across vast distances. The Saxon administration could rely on police, local councils, pastors, foresters, and railway officials to distribute propaganda and ballots. Conservatives could draw on this support too.

Behind closed doors, Friesen and his colleagues left no doubt what election outcome their reform package was intended to produce. When one (unidentified) state minister suggested that the distinction between urban and rural constituencies made little sense, he encountered “decisive opposition” from his colleagues: to eliminate this distinction would “fundamentally endanger conservative interests,” because “the election of a large estate owner in a mixed [urban–rural] constituency would be rendered almost impossible.”<sup>131</sup> The devil was in the details. The ministers wanted a seating plan in the new parliament that would be assigned by random ballot, to hinder the emergence of solid party caucuses in the lower house.<sup>132</sup> Meeting rooms should not be made available for Landtag caucuses, also to reduce partisanship. And direct elections would help ensure that “a shallow liberal spirit” could not “gain the upper hand.”

Friesen's government was motivated by the same considerations that later, in the 1880s, prompted Bismarck to support the idea of five-year rather than three-year legislative periods for the Reichstag. The enthusiasm of voters and their representatives was dampened by holding partial rather than general elections and by scattering the twenty-six or twenty-seven seats to be contested in any given year throughout the state. Both stipulations contributed to the localization—and thus the containment—of political protest. No electoral call to arms, however contentious or impassioned, could produce a groundswell of support in all parts of the kingdom, let alone an election landslide for one party. Because at least two-thirds of

<sup>129</sup> SLTW, 11, 104, and *Karte D IV 3*. See the legend to LT maps in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>130</sup> For overviews of Saxon LT constituencies 1868–1909, see the color plates in this book and the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. Only one-third of LT seats were contested every two years: the color coding on these maps shows which constituencies held elections in which years.

<sup>131</sup> GM meeting of 27.9.67, cited previously; Gise, 3.11.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841.

<sup>132</sup> GM meeting of 26.3.68, cited previously.

Landtag seats would always be held by incumbents, the business of legislation would be smoothed and its cautious consideration ensured. Why would any government *not* wish to preserve this congenial situation?

#### LEGISLATIVE BATTLES

In Act III, from November 1867 through May 1868, Friesen expected to find support for the government's reform bill in the Landtag's lower chamber and opposition in the upper house.<sup>133</sup> Both calculations were off the mark. "This law has been received by the liberal party with surprising dissatisfaction," Joseph Crowe reported from Leipzig.<sup>134</sup> A contributor to the *Constitutionelle Zeitung* referred to the bill as a "paltry patchwork." Karl Biedermann asked whether it might not be better to soldier on with the old suffrage rather than endorse a new one with such obvious flaws. Again the Left mounted a strong petition campaign; but disagreements among Social Democrats, Progressives, and National Liberals came to the fore almost immediately.<sup>135</sup> Then committee deliberations on the government's proposal dragged on through January and February 1868. By the time the lower house's committee presented its recommendations in mid-March, liberal opposition had waned further.<sup>136</sup> One critic complained that the committee's report could have been written in four days, not four months; but no outcry greeted the candid admission by the committee's conservative spokesman, Sachße, that the delay had been intentional, to permit the bill's "cautious" consideration.<sup>137</sup>

During two days of debate in March 1868, Saxon liberals criticized many aspects of the government's bill.<sup>138</sup> By that point, however, most liberals agreed that they would rather not dig in their heels for a radical reform. One deputy expressed the Progressives' belief that a compromise reform was better than none at all. A future Landtag, he reasoned, would be more willing to return to the suffrage of 15 November 1848: "I regard the bill before us . . . as a way-station where fresh coal is taken on and where one must naturally accept into the mix some water as well. I cannot regard it as either justified or clever to disembark defiantly because of a mere minute's pause and then to go back to start the journey again from the beginning."<sup>139</sup> (With such arguments the Saxon Left mirrored the stance of liberal leaders in Berlin who in 1867 and 1871 agreed to Bismarck's constitutional structure for the new Reich in the expectation that further reforms would follow quickly.) A slightly amended bill was endorsed by members of the lower house on 24 March by a vote of 64:10 and shortly

<sup>133</sup> Acting Pr. envoy Alvensleben, 18.10.67, PAAAB, Sachsen 39.

<sup>134</sup> Crowe, 2.12.67, PRO, FO 68/147; cf. Werner, 13/27.11.67, 4.12.67, HHStAV, PAV/35.

<sup>135</sup> CZ, 28.11.67, and other citations in Richter, *Meinung*, 123ff.; SHStAD, GM, Loc 63, Nr. 4; Mdl 11039 and LT 5780; *DWbl*, 30.1.69, 27.2.69; Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:213; Borrmann, "Arbeiterbewegung," 117–25, 208f.; Wiczoreck, "Trennung," 34–6.

<sup>136</sup> *LTakten* 1866/68, I. Abt., 3:155ff. (16.3.68).

<sup>137</sup> Handwritten and printed minutes of the II.K. committee's deliberations, SHStAD, LT 5948.

<sup>138</sup> *LTMit* 1866/68, II.K., 3:2613–56 (23.3.68), 3:2657–719 (24.3.68).

<sup>139</sup> *LTMit* 1866/68, II.K., 3:2664 (24.3.68).

thereafter by the upper house with only two dissenting votes. Eight of the ten nays in the lower house were cast by large estate owners.<sup>140</sup>

This outcome should not blind us to alternative reform proposals advocated by Landtag deputies who stood outside mainstream opinion in their own parties. Liberals and Conservatives alike introduced ideas into the suffrage debate that were destined to re-emerge in later decades.<sup>141</sup> Two proposals pointed clearly to future developments. The first of these was a pamphlet published in the summer of 1867 by Wilhelm August Gersdorf, about whom little is known.<sup>142</sup> The second was a minority report issued by two Conservative members of the Landtag committee charged with debating suffrage reform in Saxony.<sup>143</sup> These proposals had two features in common. First, they proposed a hybrid system of election whereby two or more sets of voters—defined by different criteria for eligibility or by residence in urban and rural districts—would elect their own representatives, who would then sit together in a Saxon parliament of roughly eighty members. Second, they both envisioned the provision of “extra” ballots to voters whose social rank qualified them for electoral preferment. In this way a hybrid system that was touted as “universal” but not “unrestricted” would save Saxony’s parliament from the mass of voters who were swayed, as Gersdorf put it, more by their momentary “mood” than their real “interests.” Neither of these proposals had much impact on Saxon suffrage reform in 1868. Nevertheless, a hybrid suffrage was the only system that the Saxon ministry of state in 1903 believed could win majority approval from the existing Landtag. Moreover, in 1909 a system of plural voting proved to be the only basis for agreement between the Saxon government and Saxony’s political parties. Hence we should pay heed to Gersdorf’s concluding argument, where he used imagery that Conservatives, National Liberals, and state ministers would revive to combat the “flood” of democracy.

The double ballot must be exercised . . . so that the voter casts his ballots . . . directly and indirectly, secretly and publicly, with and without a tax threshold, for representative and for estate-bound deputies, etc. . . . In the process the voter (as a *unit*) . . . acts according to a single will; he merely does so in two ways and in two directions—just as in the human body, where *one* thought can simultaneously set *two* arms in independent motion . . . The universal, direct suffrage that does not divide voters into classes is like a large, wide river that overflows its banks and tears down everything in its path; by contrast, the class-based suffrage that is universal, but partially direct and partially indirect, is similar to a well-laid waterworks that directs the water through systematically laid canals and pipes and with a regulated flow toward the most diverse, useful, and agreeable purposes.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>140</sup> I.K. committee minutes (20.4.68) and plenary debates (16–18.4.68, 27–28.5.68) in SHStAD, LT 5781, 5948.

<sup>141</sup> *LT Mitt* 1866/68, I.K., 2:1555f., 1561 (16.4.68).

<sup>142</sup> Gersdorf, *Einige Sätze* (1867); cf. *CZ*, 18.8.67.

<sup>143</sup> Friedrich Theodor von Criegern, an appellate court judge and estate owner in Upper Lusatia, and Leonçe Robert von Könneritz. *LT Akten* 1866/68, Beilagen . . . II.K., 3:373–418, esp. 392ff.; also *LT Mitt* 1866/68, II.K., 3:2635f. (23.3.68).

<sup>144</sup> Gersdorf, *Sätze*, 19–22, original emphasis.

## A BALANCE SHEET

On 4 June 1869, the first Landtag elections were held under the new suffrage. By one measure, Saxony now had the most progressive Landtag suffrage in Germany: 244,594 Saxon males were eligible to vote, equal to 9.9 percent of Saxony's total population. Even so, about one in two Saxon voters eligible to cast ballots in Reichstag elections was excluded from voting for his own state parliament.<sup>145</sup>

We should not let statistical snapshots blind us to the benefits of studying suffrage reform as a process. The calculations and debates that led to Saxony's successful suffrage reform of 1868 were no less tortuous than those that confronted Bismarck, Disraeli, and other conservatives in the 1860s as they inched toward universal manhood suffrage. More than one member of Disraeli's cabinet spent "a miserable arithmetical Sunday,"<sup>146</sup> as Asa Briggs once put it, trying to calculate the consequences of pegging the suffrage at a "safe" level. The best-laid plans of legislators everywhere have been confounded by faulty statistical forecasts from their advisors.

We must also consider other suffrage stipulations that inclined legislators to accept relatively low tax thresholds. Many of these offset the universal or near-universal nature of new suffrages. They did so by ensuring that certain social groups would enjoy privileges through extra votes, parallel chambers, nomination rights, and other entitlements. The redrawing of electoral boundaries, the publication of parliamentary debates, per diem payments to deputies, the length of parliamentary periods, plans for future tax reform—these were practical issues that reformers invariably considered in conjunction with tax thresholds. One might argue that Disraeli in Britain, Bismarck in Prussia, and Friesen in Saxony effectively abandoned urban constituencies to the liberals in the 1860s because other features of their reforms tightened the conservatives' hold on rural seats, which in each case were overrepresented in the new electoral balance between cities and the countryside. The significance of tax thresholds also comes more clearly into view when we consider reformers' determination to "measure up" as modern statesmen in the constitutional era. In 1868 Friesen wanted to devise a suffrage that would stand up to international standards of fairness and at the same time erase the lingering embarrassment of backwardness from the Beust era. Friesen once wrote that he would never make Beust's mistake of ignoring either the "tendencies of the age" or "the spirit of God which rules the course of history."<sup>147</sup>

Turning the coin over, what did foreigners think of Saxons' ability to accommodate change or interpret the will of God? Disraeli's Second Reform Act of 1867 had already passed the House of Commons when the British envoy in Dresden reported that "the suffrage qualification has been put as low as it possibly can be without calling in the actual proletariat class."<sup>148</sup> This assessment was in line with

<sup>145</sup> In the Reichstag elections of March 1871, 472,874 adult Saxon males, or 18.5 percent of the kingdom's inhabitants, were eligible to vote.

<sup>146</sup> Cited in Anderson, *Democracy*, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Memorandum (Sept. 1867) cited in Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. 4.3.

<sup>148</sup> Burnley, 5.10.69, PRO FO 68/149. Cf. Himmelfarb, "Politics"; Mitchell, "Mobilization"; Blewett, "Franchise."

Nostitz's declaration in the lower house that the one-Thaler threshold would give "any worker who distinguishes himself through talent, intelligence, and hard work the opportunity to attain the vote."<sup>149</sup> Naturally Nostitz did not mention that a year earlier he had argued in cabinet for a three-Thaler threshold, to prevent "the little man" from gaining "disproportionate influence" over election outcomes.<sup>150</sup>

Far-flung comparisons need not be far-fetched. It is unlikely that Berlin was the only European capital visited—or that Rudolf von Gneist, Hermann Roesler, and Lorenz von Stein were the only constitutional experts consulted—when the Meiji reformers sent a fact-finding mission abroad preparatory to drafting Japan's constitution of 1889. If members of that mission had visited Dresden before returning to Tokyo, would they still have set the tax threshold for Japan's legislature at fifteen yen?<sup>151</sup> We cannot know. Saxon legislators who passed the watershed reform of 1868 emphasized practicality over theory at every turn. They seldom referred to Stein or any other expert. But they did cite other German states' and other nations' electoral laws—for example, Sweden's parliamentary reform of 1866—to legitimate their own proposals. Even Conservatives could not resist such comparisons.<sup>152</sup>

Friesen's thinking ran in the same groove as Lorenz von Stein's conviction that statesmen must move away from the "archaic" and "fragmented" polity of corporatist society toward what he called a "social state" (but what in essence was a society of classes). Discussions about where suffrage thresholds should be pegged had direct impact not only on the first Landtag elections held under the new suffrage but also on the longer-term evolution of Saxony's electoral culture—that is, on the way Saxons conceived of their polity and acted within the constraints it imposed on their political behavior. An observation from Ian Hacking is à propos here: "The bureaucracy of statistics imposes not just by creating administrative rulings but by determining classifications within which people must think of themselves and of the actions that are open to them."<sup>153</sup> Friesen and his colleagues were forced to opt for the statistically quantifiable distinction between urban and rural constituencies as the basis of their new system because they could no longer discern or accommodate estate-bound privileges. But they also shared with Stein a vision of the state "as active historic partner in the making of civil society."<sup>154</sup>

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The impact of the 1868 Landtag suffrage reform was both positive and negative. Initially, the social composition of Saxony's House of Deputies was changed only modestly. That a conservative majority was resurrected during the 1880s illustrates that suffrage reform did not transform Saxony's parliamentary culture overnight.

<sup>149</sup> *LTMitt* 1866/68, 3:2654 (23.3.68); cf. Gise, 3.11.67, BHStAM II, MA 2841.

<sup>150</sup> Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. 4.3; cf. Nostitz (25.2.68), SHStAD, Mdl 5372.

<sup>151</sup> Meiji Japan's suffrage of 11.2.89 in Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, *Japan*, vol. 1, *Documents*, 131–52; further references in Retallack, *German Right*, 191.

<sup>152</sup> *LTMitt* 1866/68, II.K., 3:2646 (Kretschmar) and 2651 (Seiler) (23.3.68). On Swedish, Austrian, and Swiss suffrage reforms see Kurunmäki, *Representation*, chs. 8–9; Seliger/Ucakar, *Wahlrecht*; Ucakar, *Demokratie*; Adlgasser, "Kontinuität"; Gruner, *Wahlen*.

<sup>153</sup> Hacking, "History," 194.

<sup>154</sup> See Gordon, "Rationality," 30f.

Friesen's government waited eight months after the bill was approved by the Landtag (28 April 1868) to publish the new suffrage law (3 December 1868). Another six months passed before the first elections were held under its provisions (4 June 1869). These delays reflected the government's desire to postpone the dawn of a new electoral culture in Saxony as long as possible. Friesen and his ministerial colleagues initially hoped that Saxon public opinion would permit only one-third of Landtag deputies to be elected in the first test of the new suffrage. They sought an "out" that would avoid the debacle of 1848, when the opposition had won a landslide victory. If a more gradual transition could be implemented, the new deputies would learn about the "ingrained traditions" of Saxony's estate-bound Landtag; they would refrain, as Nostitz put it, "from questioning everything."<sup>155</sup> Reluctantly, Saxony's state ministers concluded that such a course was too risky: it would produce a lower house whose members had been elected according to different suffrages. That situation might lead to public "disagreements and protests" with unforeseeable consequences. Hence a general election in 1869 was unavoidable.<sup>156</sup>

Despite frequent references to the irresistible *Zeitgeist* favoring change, "all classes and strata" of society were less unanimous about the details of suffrage reform than liberals liked to think. Some National Liberals doubted whether the Saxon Landtag could reform itself at all.<sup>157</sup> In the end it did reform itself—a challenge, it should be remembered, that many parliaments in history have failed to meet. Yet Saxony's 1868 suffrage reform reflected the "abhorrence" of radical change that a writer in the *Leipziger Zeitung* identified as part of the Saxon character. Friesen struck the same note when he referred retrospectively to the 1868 suffrage reform as "a very far-reaching, but still moderate, transformation of Saxony's inner constitution."<sup>158</sup>

These observations remind us not to accept too easily claims about the force of public opinion on law-makers. It is less important to paint the Saxon suffrage reform of 1868 as modern or unmodern than to consider whether it induced Germans to rethink the principles of democratic and authoritarian governance. In the 1860s, hierarchical society based on occupational estates was not only disintegrating in Germany; it was *seen* to be disintegrating. Traditional arguments in favor of estate-bound suffrages had obviously become inadequate. But compelling alternatives were elusive. Socio-moral milieus based on solid class allegiances or confessional conflicts had not yet come into focus. Friesen, Bismarck, and other conservatives preferred to make revolutions rather than suffer them. As reluctant modernizers, they found that those "miserable arithmetical Sundays" provided illumination when constitutional leaps in the dark were needed.

<sup>155</sup> Nostitz memorandum (29.6.67) cited in Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. 4.3.

<sup>156</sup> GM meeting of 27.9.67, Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 102.

<sup>157</sup> *Gb* 26, 2. Sem. (1867): 2:480.

<sup>158</sup> *LZ*, 15.10.66, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 63; Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:47. Cf. Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:295; Städtischer Verein Leipzig to II.K., 11.12.72, and other petitions in SHStAD, LT 6827.

Comparisons are also useful to understand the modernizing strategies pursued by other German statesmen. In the Grand Duchy of Baden, the government explicitly cited the 1866 war and the prospect of a united Germany as reasons *not* to consider comprehensive suffrage reform.<sup>159</sup> Suffrage reform in the Kingdom of Württemberg was enacted at the same time and broadly with the same result as Saxony's reform. Württemberg's Minister of the Interior Ernst von Geßler recognized that a modern state could no longer be based on the support of traditional (agrarian) elites alone. Like Friesen in Saxony, this conservative reformer was not going to sacrifice Württemberg's vital interests on the altar of nationalism or liberalism. Yet Geßler was convinced that any struggle against the forces of change could never repeat the victory of 1848–49: hence the modern state should never attempt one. Instead, timely suffrage reform should be conceived as the means to sidestep a constitutional crisis.

Geßler elaborated this strategy in a memorandum to his king. Referring to the role of universal suffrage in the Frankfurt Assembly of 1849, the Reichstag of 1867, and the Second French Empire, he wrote that "it is more prudent to initiate the step required by the logic of circumstances quickly and comprehensively at the outset, rather than to let it be wrung from us by stages in a struggle that the government will have to undertake not on its own behalf but for particular classes of citizens who have long enjoyed special privileges—a struggle, moreover, in which the government might well be abandoned by these classes at the decisive moment and would therefore have to take the entire weight of battle upon its own shoulders."<sup>160</sup> Friesen and Nostitz had made similar observations about Saxony's Conservatives: they lacked the energy and organization to provide the government with the support it needed. These state ministers were therefore prepared to reach out to liberals and to embark on a course of prudent reform. They did so only because such a course of action promised to deliver broad, resilient support for the existing state. However, the middle ground upon which liberals and conservatives met was narrower and less durable than these statesmen supposed.

## A "LIBERAL ERA"?

We have drawn nearer to each other . . . and a great deal of mistrust has been removed.

—Government leader Richard von Friesen to Saxon liberals, 1870<sup>161</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Ehrismann, *Liberalismus*, 134; cf. Sepaintner, "Wahlrecht"; Gall, *Liberalismus*. On Hessen, see Lion, *Landtagswahlrecht*, 108ff.; on Bavaria, Theilhaber, *Jahre*, 25; on Lübeck, Fuchs, "Privilegien," 36ff.

<sup>160</sup> Geßler to King Karl of Württemberg, 27.3.67, cited in Menzinger, *Verfassungsrevision*, 60; cf. Brandt, *Parlamentarismus*, 162–9; Brandt, "Partizipation."

<sup>161</sup> Cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 137.



The guest will judge better of a feast than the cook.

—Aristotle, *Politics*<sup>162</sup>

Saxony did not jump into the era of universal suffrage with both feet. Its statisticians, among the best in Germany, left historians to guess at the parties' vote totals in the Landtag elections of 4 June 1869. Other issues arising from the 1868 suffrage reform remained unresolved. Could the Left push suffrage reform another step forward? Could it expose government influence-peddling during election campaigns? Would the balance of liberals and conservatives in the lower house produce gridlock? Could Baron von Friesen remain loyal to the emerging German nation state while protecting Saxon interests?

By the mid-1870s, liberals and Friesen had reduced the legislative backlog of the 1860s. They reformed Saxony's local administration, taxes, press law, and school supervision. Friesen's political acumen and flexibility in these years contrasts with the rigidity of his successors. However, he did not sacrifice conservative interests. After Friesen's resignation, the Conservatives reasserted themselves quickly. That resurgence was made easier because Saxon particularism had not disappeared after 1866: in many ways it had grown, fueled by Bismarck's and the National Liberals' "centralizing" activities in Berlin. Saxony's "liberal era" did not constitute an historical epoch. Was it even an episode?<sup>163</sup>

#### THE LANDTAG ELECTIONS OF 1869

In March 1868 one political insider in Dresden noted that "it remains an open question . . . whether and to what extent the chambers elected under the new [suffrage] law will allow the government to persist in its previous administrative and political stance."<sup>164</sup> For Friesen, the political outlook did not brighten much during the run-up to the first elections under the new Landtag suffrage. As soon as the suffrage bill had been approved in mid-1868, even leftist deputies who voted for it pronounced it lacking and began agitating for further reforms. Social Democrats focused on the tax threshold of one Thaler, Progressives on the failure to return to the 1848 suffrage, National Liberals on the government's continuing preferment of rural interests.<sup>165</sup> Pursuing a line of argument that would take on greater significance after 1900, liberals claimed that when property, personal, business, and indirect taxes were considered together, the cities deserved to be represented by at least as many constituencies as the countryside. This issue complicated Friesen's plan to overhaul the state's tax system.<sup>166</sup> These desiderata lent a certain *frisson* to the election campaign because Saxons knew this would be the only general (full) election of their Landtag for the foreseeable future.

<sup>162</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 4, 1296a 1–3.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Blaschke, "Verwaltung," 781, and the more nuanced Schröder, "Era."

<sup>164</sup> Werner, 23.3.68, HHStAV, PAV/36.

<sup>165</sup> See CZ 9/12/20/26.5.69 and 4/6/8/9/16/24.6.69. cited in Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. 4.3.

<sup>166</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:40.

In February 1869, about 150 Saxon Conservatives issued a vague manifesto and called on their supporters to rally behind a mix of “constitutional,” “German Saxon,” and “federalist-constitutional” party labels. They equated “liberal” with “extreme” legislation, they pledged to preserve Saxony’s “independence,” and they promised to oppose higher military expenditures demanded by Prussia.<sup>167</sup> During the election campaign, statements supporting Conservative candidates rarely appeared in newspapers; instead they were found in circulars distributed with the approval and active assistance of civil servants, pastors, and agricultural associations.<sup>168</sup> The liberal message barely penetrated the Saxon countryside.

The Left could not agree whether to participate in Landtag elections at all, because the new suffrage fell so far short of their ideal.<sup>169</sup> At a meeting of the Saxon People’s Party in Leipzig on 18 May 1869, the socialists under Bebel and Liebknecht opted for a state-wide boycott. Besides the difficulty of finding people who paid more than ten Thaler in annual taxes to qualify as candidates, they knew many of their supporters were excluded by the one-Thaler tax threshold for voters. Some Progressives joined the boycott. The National Liberals played a more prominent role in this campaign compared to 1867. They organized local and state-wide assemblies in conjunction with Progressives who did not join the boycott. This Liberal Party called for reforms of Saxony’s local administration, schools, tax system, and the press—all areas in which liberals could soon claim some success. Demands in the arena of electoral politics were destined to remain unfulfilled: these included “expansion of the suffrage, elimination of the distinction between city and countryside, elimination of the two-chamber system, significant shortening of legislative periods,” and liberalization of Saxony’s law of association from 1850.<sup>170</sup> In the final weeks of the election campaign, the National Liberals gained the upper hand: “their activity is starting to frighten me,” wrote the Austrian envoy, “because I don’t see much of a counter-effort from the government- and Conservative party.”<sup>171</sup>

Voter turnout on election day was only 40 percent across the kingdom and lower in Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz. Election returns prepared by the Saxon Statistical Office are incomplete, but they offer a starting point for analysis (see Table 2.3).

In Saxony’s forty-five rural constituencies, Conservative victories (25) outnumbered liberal ones.<sup>172</sup> National Liberal strength around Leipzig and Zittau contributed to the combined liberals’ twenty rural victories. More striking is a swathe of left-liberal victories extending from the center of the kingdom eastwards along its southern border. The political complexion of the rural constituencies lying between

<sup>167</sup> AHM Döbeln to KHM Leipzig, 21.2.69, and Cons. manifesto, LZ, 26.5.69; Schröder, *Landtagswahlen*, 38f.

<sup>168</sup> For this and the following, Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 104–8.

<sup>169</sup> See *Demokratie*, esp. 11–16.

<sup>170</sup> “Leipzig Programm” (31.1.69), Liberale Fraction, *Rechenschaftsbericht*, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Werner, 22.5.69, HHStAV, PAV/37; cf. Burnley, 18.6.69, PRO, FO68/149.

<sup>172</sup> See the map of Landtag elections in Saxony, 1869 (rural and urban), in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

Table 2.3. Saxon Landtag Elections, 4 June 1869

Constituency Type (no.)	Eligible Voters (no.)	Turnout Rate (%)	Conservatives			Liberals		
			Votes (no.)	Votes (%)	Seats (no.)	Votes (no.)	Votes (%)	Seats (no.)
Large cities (11)	36,296	34.0	3,031	24.6	3	8,601	69.8	8*
Other urban (24)	55,464	41.3	6,185	27.0	9	8,837	38.6	15**
Rural (45)	152,834	40.6	33,060	53.3	25	17,162	27.7	20***
Total Saxony (80)	244,594	39.8	42,276	43.5	37	34,600	35.6	43

Notes: \*6 National Liberals, 2 Progressives. \*\*9 National Liberals, 6 Progressives. \*\*\*4 National Liberals, 11 Progressives, 4 Liberals, 1 unknown.

Sources: ZSSB (1905): 1–12, incorporating corrections from SLTW, esp. Tables 11, 18, 23; *Verzeichniß, Sitzordnung* (1.10.69, 11.12.71, 7.5.74, 23.10.75); and other Landtag handbooks.

Chemnitz and Zwickau in the west reflected the hotly contested nature of this industrialized region. When comparing the party affiliation of the victorious candidate with the distribution of votes among competing candidates in rural districts, it is important to know that a simple majority, rather than an absolute majority, was sufficient for a candidate to win election, as long as he gathered at least one-third of all votes cast. Thus no run-off ballots were necessary, as they often were in Reichstag elections. Even a tight contest with three or more candidates permitted the immediate proclamation of a winner.

Among Saxony's eleven big-city and twenty-four "other urban" constituencies, almost twice as many constituencies (23) fell to liberal candidates as to Conservatives (12). Among the twenty-three urban seats won by liberals, most (15) went to National Liberals. These reflected National Liberal strength in Leipzig and among industrialists and other businessmen around Chemnitz and Zwickau. Such a concentration of National Liberal strength helps explain why Conservatives in the mid-1870s devoted so much energy to developing a better party organization in the western half of the kingdom, which they wanted to take back from their "unpatriotic" opponents. In 1869, Progressives were more evenly distributed throughout the state, in part because they did better in towns than in big cities. These geographic areas of party strength in 1869 are worth noting not because they remained fixed but because no other general election was held in all eighty Landtag constituencies for the next forty years, until 1909.

What to make of these results? Contemporaries were unsure. In the new Landtag session, only twenty-seven Landtag deputies were incumbents; fifty-three were newcomers. Karl Biedermann claimed that Saxon liberals held a majority of seats in the new parliament.<sup>173</sup> Others offered divergent tallies.<sup>174</sup> But if we consider their voting records we can say that the combined liberals held forty-three seats and

<sup>173</sup> Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:296.

<sup>174</sup> Werner, 11.6.69, HHStAV, PAV/37; Crowe, 16.6.69, PRO, FO 68/150; Eichmann, 6.6.69, PAAAB, Sachsen 39, Bd. 2.

the Conservatives thirty-seven. With their confident pronouncements and their ambitious agenda, the liberals convinced many observers that they were in the driver's seat. As soon as the new Landtag session opened on 30 September 1869, liberals launched official protests against tainted election contests.<sup>175</sup> They also called for a return to the 1848 suffrage, elimination of Saxony's upper chamber, and the removal of tax thresholds for both voters and candidates.<sup>176</sup> Failure to pass these motions did not prevent the National Liberals from trumpeting their successes in a report to their electors barely two months after the session began. Progressives were not shrinking violets either. They were well represented in a published compendium of *Kammerraketen*—"amusing and piquant" speeches—compiled after the session ended in late February 1870.<sup>177</sup>

Neither the government nor the Conservatives surrendered to liberal bluster. Interior Minister Nostitz and Regional Governor Burgsdorff invoked §24 of Saxony's Association Law to prevent local liberal clubs from building up a network of associations throughout the kingdom. In the lower house, the National Liberals did not dare to propose Biedermann or another party member for the chamber's directorate.<sup>178</sup> Nostitz and Friesen were both heartened when a Conservative declared that the suffrage reform of 1868 had fulfilled the government's obligation to make good the coup d'état of June 1850: as an "act of peace, of forgiveness, of forgetting," it underpinned the legitimacy of Saxony's parliamentary system.<sup>179</sup>

By December 1869 Friesen's outlook had changed. His options appeared to be narrowing. He now feared that Conservative particularists in the upper house, spurred on by arch-Conservatives in Prussia's Herrenhaus,<sup>180</sup> wanted to drive him from office. To that end they were spreading rumors that King Johann no longer supported his policies and was contemplating appointing Nostitz as his successor. With this tactic Conservatives hoped to sow discord in liberal ranks, draw particularist Progressives to their side, and reassert the power of the unreformed upper house. The National Liberals might have provided relief from this pressure. Biedermann and other National Liberals tried to find the same political register as Friesen; but they sang from his songbook more often than he from theirs. Friesen asserted that he could not turn to the National Liberals for support in the long run. The Saxon government could never forget that in 1866 the National Liberals "took a position antipathetic to the continued existence of the Kingdom of Saxony." "No good Saxon," Friesen added, could ever make his peace with Biedermann, "no matter how moderate he is trying to appear now."<sup>181</sup> Facing headwinds in both houses of the reconstituted Landtag, Friesen needed to steer his own course.

<sup>175</sup> See SHStAD, LT 6231.

<sup>176</sup> *LTMitt* 1869/70, II.K., 1:490 (4.11.69); cf. other materials in SHStAD, LT 6232.

<sup>177</sup> Liberale Fraction, *Rechenschaftsbericht; Heiteres*; Schmidt, *Fünfzig Jahre*, II; *Volksvertreter*; *DZ*, 3.10.69; Werner, 16.10.69, 6.11.69, and Count Ludwig Parr, 25.2.70, 14.4.70, HHStAV, PAV/37 and/38.

<sup>178</sup> Nostitz's circular (2.10.69) cited in Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 107f.; Eichmann, 31.8.69, 30.9.69, PAAAB, Sachsen 40; Werner, 9.6.69, HHStAV, PAV/37.

<sup>179</sup> *LTMitt* 1869/70, II.K., 1:468, 1:474f. (Gustav Ackermann, 4.11.69).

<sup>180</sup> Spenkuch, *Herrenhaus*, 90–2; Ritter, *Konservativen*, 314ff.

<sup>181</sup> Eichmann, 2.12.69, PAAAB, Sachsen 40. Cf. Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:296–316; Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:98f., 280f., 378–402.

## HIGH TIDE?

When the Landtag session of 1869/70 got underway, Saxon liberals consciously tried to generate the same legislative momentum that National Liberals had achieved in the Reichstag. A year earlier, one of Saxony's representatives in Berlin had marveled at the speed with which the Reichstag was conducting its business: "We're doing more here in six weeks than our Landtag [does] in six months and the old Federal Diet [did] in six years."<sup>182</sup> Saxony's political vernacular signaled that National Liberals had seized the initiative. The Landtag of 1848/49 had been labeled the Opposition Landtag by its supporters and the Unreasonable Landtag by its critics. The 1850 session had been the Coup d'état Landtag. Now, the session of 1869/70 became known as the Motion Landtag. The longer session of 1871/73 became the Reform Landtag.<sup>183</sup>

One of the liberals' first successes lay close to Karl Biedermann's heart: the Saxon Press Law of 24 March 1870.<sup>184</sup> Liberals wanted to free Saxony's newspapers, journals, and book publishing industry from the control of civil servants. They also wanted to permit publication of Landtag and Reichstag debates without any constraints, shift the right to ban non-Saxon newspapers to the courts, and have press offences tried before juries. Biedermann expressed surprise that the government went so far in meeting liberal wishes. But he was disappointed when the Saxon Press Law of 1870 was superseded by the more restrictive Reich Press Law of May 1874. The latter reflected Bismarck's hypersensitivity to press criticism. But its passage was made more likely because liberals were worried by Social Democratic and Center Party gains in the elections of January 1874.

Liberals and the government also worked together to reform Saxony's tax system. They sponsored the ground-breaking income tax of 1877/78, on which other states' tax reforms were soon modeled.<sup>185</sup> The reform of local government likewise brought tangible success for both parties. It passed in April 1873 without causing a showdown with Conservatives in the upper house, as happened in Prussia when Junkers in the Herrenhaus refused to pass the Rural Government Act.<sup>186</sup> Saxony's Local Government Act separated the administrative and judicial functions of local authorities, bringing Saxony closer to the liberal ideal of a state ruled by law.<sup>187</sup> Liberals thereby achieved a measure of self-government that other German and foreign observers compared favorably with their own.<sup>188</sup> But this reform also served the government's ends. Friesen wanted "strong" and "healthy" self-government because it would "deflect public feeling from its fascination with vague political

<sup>182</sup> Albert Weinlig to his wife, 19.10.67, cited in Domsch, *Weinlig*, 80.

<sup>183</sup> *Widerstandslandtag, Unverständnislandtag, Staatsstreichlandtag, Antragslandtag, Reformlandtag*.

<sup>184</sup> BAP, RKA 1302; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:325–30; Stürmer, *Regierung*, 62–5; Huber, *Dokumente*, 2:455–61. "Volksvertreter," 581; *Heiteres*, 51.

<sup>185</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:425–8.

<sup>186</sup> *LT Mitt* 1871/73, II.K., 1:343–418 (15–17.1.72); *GVBl* (1873): 275; (1874): 241; Eichmann, 26.11.72, PAAAB, Sachsen 44; Paumgarten, 27.12.71 (ff.), BHStAM II, MA 2844. Cf. Wagner, *Bauern*.

<sup>187</sup> *GVBl* (1873), 295–321, 321–27, 328–50. Dietrich, "Verwaltungsreform"; Blaschke, "Verwaltungs," 784f.

<sup>188</sup> Dietrich, "Verwaltungsreform," 51, 55ff., 63 (for the government "Motiven" of 30.12.71).

declamations.”<sup>189</sup> Younger Conservatives provided the votes necessary to pass the bill. They assumed, correctly, that conservatives would wield considerable influence in the smaller representational bodies that were also reconstituted at this time.<sup>190</sup>

The most conflict-ridden bill passed during the “liberal era” was the School Bill of 1874. School reform had been promised in the Motion Landtag of 1869/70. It was steered through the next two parliamentary sessions by the new minister of religion and education, Carl Gerber (the Conservative Reichstag member for Leipzig in 1867).<sup>191</sup> Liberal reformers in Saxony wanted to introduce the principle of “expert” school supervision, to reduce the existing influence of clergy in this role. They also advocated continuing education for students aged fifteen to seventeen and a more science-based curriculum.<sup>192</sup> In each of these areas, partial liberal success made Saxony’s education system among the very best in Germany. Yet, the government was happy to transfer financial responsibility for primary schools to the municipalities. It did not let liberals marginalize clerical supervision in schools: for Christian conservatives, including Gerber, that would have gone too far.

The struggle to fashion a school bill acceptable to both houses of the Landtag cost Friesen and the liberals more political capital than either side anticipated. Liberals had to accept unpalatable amendments introduced in the upper house, including the obligation that children of dissenters take religious instruction. As on other issues, Friesen’s government struggled to find a way to mediate the political antagonisms “between liberal businessmen and trades-people in the cities and conservative estate owners and bourgeois farmers in the countryside.”<sup>193</sup> After 1873 the reformist momentum of the “liberal era” waned quickly, despite Hans Blum’s wishful thinking that seventeen years of political sterility under Beust (1849–66) had been overcome in only seven years under Friesen.<sup>194</sup> Both Friesen and the National Liberals found more occasions to compromise with the Conservatives. Meanwhile relations soured between National Liberals and Progressives.<sup>195</sup> Although the two liberal parties increased their representation slightly in the Landtag elections of 1873 and 1875, the Progressive Wilhelm Schaffrath was not re-elected president of the lower house; the National Liberals refused to support him.<sup>196</sup> The Conservative Ludwig Haberkorn returned to that post, which he held until 1890. A Conservative renaissance had begun.

<sup>189</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:383.

<sup>190</sup> Eichmann, 27/29.11.72, PAAAB, Sachsen 44.

<sup>191</sup> *Gb* 30, 2. Sem. (1871), 1:357–9; “Motiven” (8.12.71), *LTakten* 1871/73, Dekrete, 1. Abt., 2:181–91.

<sup>192</sup> *Volksschulwesen* (1876); Adam, “Schulgesetz”; Georgi, “Kämpfe”; Gernert, *Schulvorschriften*; Julius Richter, *Geschichte*; Blaschke, “Verwaltung,” 787f.; Goldt, *Parlamentarismus*, 169–91; Weichlein, *Region*, chap. 5.

<sup>193</sup> Eichmann, 12.4.73, PAAAB, Sachsen 44; cf. Paumgarten, 21.4.72, BHStAM II, MA 2845.

<sup>194</sup> *Gb* 32, 1. Sem. (1873): 2:78–80; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:312–16.

<sup>195</sup> British envoy to Saxony, George Strachey, 21.10.74, PRO, FO 68/158; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Karl von und zu Franckenstein, 31.10.74, HHStAV, PAV/40; Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Count Ludwig von Paumgarten-Frauenstein, 4.5.73, 27.9.73, 19.6.74, BHStAM II, MA 2846–7.

<sup>196</sup> Prussian envoy to Saxony, Count Eberhard zu Solms-Sonnenwalde, 14.10.75, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 2.

## SAXONY AND THE REICH

Historians have taken the decline of particularist sentiment in Saxony after 1866 to be a distinguishing feature of the "liberal era."<sup>197</sup> According to this view, the consolidation of national unity in Berlin found its natural complement in Saxony, where liberal reforms were implemented and Conservatives pushed to the wall. We have already discovered that things were more complicated than that. Like suffrage reform, the *Reichsidee* advanced by fits and starts. No one at the time saw its triumph as inevitable.

Consider the sphere of diplomatic and military relations.<sup>198</sup> Saxony's entry into the North German Confederation was a shotgun marriage—not even a marriage of convenience. But after a successful war against France, Saxons opened their arms to a brighter future—as the *Constitutionelle Zeitung* put it, a "German springtime!"<sup>199</sup> Most Saxons hoped after 1867 that the southern states of Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg would be admitted to the Confederation. They also took pride in their military contribution to Germany's victory over the French in 1870. At last they had found themselves on the winning side, with Crown Prince Albert's field marshal's baton to prove it. Saxon valor at the battles of St. Privat and Gravelotte allowed Saxons to buy into the Reich idea without selling out small-state patriotism. Saxony's military and diplomatic successes atoned, at least in part, for its defeats in 1756–63, 1813, and 1866. However, the caesura of 1870/71 was not as neat as this viewpoint suggests.

Before 1871, King Johann and his ministers were eager both to show their loyalty to the North German Confederation and to protect their interests as its second largest state. Then Bavaria usurped Saxony's role as Prussia's junior partner. Saxons felt unjustly treated even before the German Empire was proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on 18 January 1871 (an event King Johann and Crown Prince Albert chose not to attend). While Bismarck was busy in October and November 1870 bribing Bavaria's King Ludwig II to enter the new union voluntarily, he did everything in his power to salve the egos of Friesen and War Minister Alfred von Fabrice. He designated Friesen as his *Kommissar* to conduct negotiations with the southern German states. Fabrice became *Generalgouverneur* of the French Departement of Seine-et-Oise and Bismarck's stand-in during armistice negotiations. Both men received generous payments from the French indemnity as "heroes" of the war. Their new fortunes came with slings and arrows, for Bismarck's preferment did not improve their standing at home. Friesen and Fabrice were attacked in Saxony's particularist press as "weaklings" and "Prussians." It was not just wounded pride these men nursed during that winter.<sup>200</sup> They and their king felt that negotiations with the southern states represented a missed opportunity to diminish the political weight of the democratically-elected Reichstag. As King Johann wrote to Friesen on 19 October 1870, "Yesterday I could not get out of

<sup>197</sup> See inter alia Weichlein, "Saxons"; cf. Schröder, "Era"; Stürmer, *Regierung*, 104.

<sup>198</sup> See Philippi, "Verstimmungen," and Richter, *Meinung*, 95–116, 138–53.

<sup>199</sup> *CZ*, 31.3.71, cited in Richter, *Meinung*, 154.

<sup>200</sup> See Prince Albert to King Johann, 7.2.71, cited in Kretzschmar, *Zeit*, 154.

My head the idea that German affairs are presently being reconstituted with the southern states without Our involvement and that the last opportunity may thereby be lost for improving Our position in the North German Confederation." Such "improvements," as in 1866, included the creation of an upper house. The king also complained that the "radical and republican party" was so dominant in Württemberg that he "could more easily foresee this state joining Switzerland than the North German Confederation."<sup>201</sup>

The list of other diplomatic issues that remained neuralgic is a long one. Would Saxony maintain its embassies in other capitals, and would foreign envoys continue to be stationed in Dresden? Would the Wettin dynasty succumb to ultramontane influences at court? Would Friesen prevail in his long struggle with Bismarck to preserve the autonomy of Saxony's railways and the state income they provided? What about the Prussian and Saxon heirs to the throne? After having faced each other on the battlefield on 3 July 1866, would Albert and Friedrich Wilhelm follow their fathers on the path of reconciliation? Would Bismarck's ambitious plans to consolidate the Reich's finances—through a tobacco monopoly and protective tariffs—destroy the remnants of sovereignty Saxony had salvaged in 1866–67? On each count, the allure of the Reich appeared to be shrinking, not growing. Anti-Prussian sentiments continued to infuse popular and political newspapers. If anything, Saxon statesmen were more skeptical than public opinion about Bismarck and his wooing of Saxony as Prussia's inalienable ally. Having climbed aboard Bismarck's Reich, they felt themselves on a roller-coaster ride: around every corner loomed unknown dangers. If a call should ever come to disembark, they did not want to miss it. But the opportunity never arose.

Some diplomats stationed in Dresden believed that Saxon particularism was waning inexorably from 1871 onward. The British envoy George Strachey represented this viewpoint when he reported to London on the occasion of Kaiser Wilhelm I's visit to Leipzig in September 1876. The Kaiser, Strachey noted, did not convey to "his" subjects the Prussian arrogance that Saxons had found so humiliating during the Prussian occupation ten years earlier. Instead Leipzig's citizens showed themselves pleasantly surprised by Wilhelm's lack of presumption and his deference to Saxony's own royal family: "They noticed that the Emperor did not bring the Empire with him to Leipzig."<sup>202</sup> Strachey's observation fits well with a body of historical literature that asks us to see post-unification Germany as Eugen Weber saw the French Third Republic: instead of turning "peasants into Frenchmen," the lure of national institutions turned "Saxons into Germans."<sup>203</sup>

However: the Prussian envoy Count Eberhard zu Solms-Sonnenwalde was not alone when he claimed in the mid-1870s that Saxon particularism had become more rabid than it was ten years earlier.<sup>204</sup> Prussia's envoy in Munich agreed:

<sup>201</sup> Eichmann, 18.3.68, in Historische Reichskommission, *Politik*, 9:789f.

<sup>202</sup> Strachey, 8.9.76, PRO, FO 68/160.

<sup>203</sup> Hobsbawm, "Traditions"; Weber, *Peasants*; Weichlein, "Saxons"; Weichlein, *Region*; Fink, "Region"; Klein, *Reich*.

<sup>204</sup> Solms, 22.6.75, 17.5.77, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bde. 2, 4; cf. Franckenstein, 6.1.77, HHStAV, PAV/42.



"Saxony is the intellectual fount of all resistance against the Empire . . . The wound of 1815 will remain forever open, and hatred towards Prussia is getting stronger, not weaker. How far that hatred extends we have seen in the last Reichstag elections. Only Leipzig . . . is loyal."<sup>205</sup> In assessing these observations, we should remember that the evolution of national and sub-national identities was not a zero-sum game. Saxons did not have to divest themselves of their regional identity to embrace the Reich. By cultivating Saxon traditions or inventing new ones, it actually grew easier to be good Saxons and good Germans at the same time. For Saxons, it was a cause for satisfaction, not lamentation, that Germany was a nation of provincials.<sup>206</sup> After 1871, unification looked different depending where you were in Germany and how you got there. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1870s, pride in Germany's national achievement was becoming confused with pride in its national mission. The issue of how to defend the Reich against its "inner enemies" was taking on new importance. After 1877, Germans discovered that *Reichsfeinde*, too, looked different when viewed from national and provincial standpoints.

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The decade that followed the "German Civil War" of 1866 was indeed an age when new ideas were filling the world. In no realm of politics was this more apparent than in discussions about what German parliaments could and should achieve. Bismarck's decision in April 1866 to throw universal manhood suffrage and a national parliament into battle against his enemies in Central Europe in one sense belonged to a by-gone era. His calculations about the pro-state and anti-liberal effects of universal suffrage derived mainly from his experience of events in 1848–49 and his conflict with liberals in the Prussian Landtag in the first half of the 1860s. After Bismarck dictated the outline of Germany's constitutional structure in the autumn of 1866, others fought battles for and against parliamentarism, constitutionalism, monarchy, and fair elections. In Saxony, those battles were inaugurated in the winter of 1866–67—on the hustings, in diplomatic telegrams, on the floor of the North German Reichstag, in the press. In Dresden as in Berlin, liberals, conservatives, and the state all wanted to define the rules of the parliamentary game. Saxony was embedded within the North German Confederation, but its Landtag reconstituted itself in 1868.

Saxony's state ministry could not prevent liberals from questioning the foundations of good government and state sovereignty. Two Reichstag elections in 1867 and one in March 1871 ensured that national affairs penetrated ever more deeply into Saxon political life. A muted Landtag election campaign in the autumn of 1866 led to acrimonious legislative sessions when liberal demands for reform were raised with unprecedented vehemence and determination. When a radically new suffrage was agreed for Saxon Landtag elections in 1868, the government could only defer, not prevent, the activation and polarization of Saxon politics.

<sup>205</sup> Prussian envoy to Bavaria, Baron Georg von Werthern (Munich), 16.3.77, cited in Philipp, "Verstimmungen," 225f.

<sup>206</sup> Applegate, *Nation*. See also Green, *Fatherlands*.

The Landtag election of June 1869 was a leap in the dark; but a soft landing had already been prepared—through the decision to renew only one-third of Landtag seats every two years and to prevent urban voters from gaining equitable representation. Not unlike their party colleagues in Prussia and the Reich, Saxon Conservatives took five years to recover from the events of 1866. But they were better prepared in Saxony than in Prussia to stage a political comeback in the second half of the 1870s.

In 1866, the small band of socialists and democrats around August Bebel had constituted one of the *least* tangible threats facing Germany. Twelve years later, Bismarck needed only a few shots fired on Unter den Linden to launch a campaign for law and order.

# 3

## Enemies of the Reich

In 1869 the struggle between liberals and conservatives was still paramount in Saxony. Eight years later, election battles between liberals and conservatives had not ceased but they had become less important than the war against the Reich's "inner enemies." During the 1870s a fragile consensus emerged about how best to combat socialism. This process was slow and uneven, with false starts and more than a few reversals. The next chapter explores why right-wing parties and the state also saw liberals and Jews as subversive. Here the focus falls on anti-socialist strategies deployed in Reichstag elections during the 1870s. An immense political divide opened up between Social Democrats and the non-socialist parties.<sup>1</sup> Or so it seemed. A closer look reveals uncertainty and division on both sides.

### THE RISE OF SAXON SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Social Democracy and ultramontaniam—these two enemies will never be appeased, for they pursue aims that are fundamentally unattainable in . . . any healthy political system: the one wants to subjugate the state to the Church, the other wants to dismember it into little republics.

—Karl Biedermann, in the Saxon Landtag, 1869<sup>2</sup>

The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket.

—Joseph Conrad<sup>3</sup>

It was a portent. When Karl Biedermann stood up in the "Motion Landtag" of 1869/70 to defend the liberal agenda, he declared that Saxony could not hope for military security or union with the south German states as long as it faced the twin dangers of socialism and the Catholic Church. In the 1870s, Social Democracy emerged as the most immediate danger. Yet different responses to this "threat" were provided by central authorities in Berlin and Dresden, by civil servants, the courts, political parties, and the press.

<sup>1</sup> Among *bürgerliche Parteien*, contemporaries included all non-socialist parties, not just "bourgeois" parties.

<sup>2</sup> Liberale Fraction, *Rechenschaftsbericht*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (1907), ch. 4.

“PROVOCATIONS”

Between 1867 and 1874 the Social Democratic movement in Saxony and Germany grew rapidly. Four aspects of Social Democracy’s rise seemed particularly provocative (in the sense of requiring an energetic response): its growing organizational strength, its success in winning election battles, Marxism’s spreading influence, and socialists’ determination to use parliament and the press to speak to the masses. A genuinely mass-based, cohesive movement would have been frightening enough to Saxon, Prussian, and Reich authorities. So would the prospect of socialists commanding a majority in any local, state, or national parliament. So would the systematic use of violence. So would the prospect of imminent revolution.

But none of these scenarios was realistic. In the 1870s, the Social Democratic movement had far fewer members, supporters, and voters than we might suppose from the reactions of its opponents. Instead it was Bebel’s and Liebknecht’s celebrated pronouncements that really horrified socialism’s enemies. These “soldiers of the revolution” attacked the Franco-German War of 1870/71 as unjust. They refused to compromise with dynastic rule. They denounced sham parliaments. And they supported the demands of working men and women of all nations.

Factional disputes within the Lassallean wing of socialism and between it and the Saxon People’s Party percolated in the late 1860s. Bebel and Liebknecht attracted some Lassalleans when they founded the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SDAP) at the Eisenach Congress in August 1869, which affiliated itself with the International Workingmen’s Association, or First International.<sup>4</sup> In May 1875 socialists achieved a closer (though still uneasy) coalition of Lassallean and Eisenachers at the Gotha Congress.<sup>5</sup> The party was renamed the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany (SAPD). Only at the Erfurt Congress in October 1891 did Marxism become the doctrinal core of the party.<sup>6</sup> By that time the party had taken the name by which it is still known today and which will henceforth be used as a convenient shorthand: the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD).

The Gotha Congress is noteworthy because scrutiny of delegates’ credentials revealed the approximate balance of Lassalleans and Eisenachers in the new party. Nationally, the Bebel–Liebknecht wing was in a minority, whereas the situation was reversed in Saxony.<sup>7</sup> Congress delegates represented 25,480 paid-up members across the Reich, including 4,597 from Saxony. Thus 18 percent of Germany’s Social Democrats lived in Saxony, although Saxony made up less than 7 percent of the Reich’s total population. The strength of the Eisenach wing lay in the western

<sup>4</sup> See “The Social Democratic Workers’ Party, Eisenach Program (8 August 1869),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=688](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=688).

<sup>5</sup> See “Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany, Gotha Program (May 1875),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1844](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1844).

<sup>6</sup> See “The Erfurt Program (1891)” GHDI, vol. 5, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=766](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=766).

<sup>7</sup> Of 129 delegates at the Gotha Congress, fifty-six were Eisenachers and seventy-three were Lassalleans. Of the eighty Saxon localities that sent delegates, sixty were represented solely by Bebel’s wing. Zwahr, “Arbeiterbewegung,” 457f., 466–8, 492–5.

**Table 3.1.** Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, Membership in Saxony and the Reich, 1875

Administrative region ( <i>Kreishauptmannschaft</i> )	Party members living in towns and cities (no.)	Towns and cities represented (no.)	Party members living in (rural) villages (no.)	(Rural) villages represented (no.)	Total party members (no.)
Bautzen	100	3	25	1	125
Dresden	572	5	62	2	634
Leipzig	918	11	213	4	1,131
Zwickau	2,066	28	641	26	2,707
Saxony total	3,656	47	941	33	4,597
Reich total	22,120	200	3,360	92	25,480

Source: Compiled by the author from Zwahr, "Arbeiterbewegung," distinguishing between *Städte* and *Dörfer*.

half of the kingdom: more Social Democrats lived in the administrative region of Zwickau than in the other three regions combined. The big cities of Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz accounted for just over one-third of party members in Saxony with 440, 631, and 527 members respectively. The socialists' following extended to the "industrial villages" in the immediate vicinity of these metropoli. But Social Democrats were distributed very unevenly. The rapidly growing industrial city of Crimmitschau, with almost 18,000 inhabitants, had 500 party members in 1875. The old mining city of Freiberg (population 23,559) had only four (see Table 3.1).

The best way to assess the "provocative" tone of Social Democratic pronouncements in these years is to read them. The written word was not the only or even the most important way Bebel and Liebknecht reached their supporters. From 1867 to 1873 they were busy founding local workers' associations, undermining the influence of their Lassallean opponents, drawing up model statutes for trade unions, lobbying for the First International, rallying support for striking workers, even investigating the causes of workplace accidents. Such investigations often placed blame on rapacious employers and incompetent state inspectors. Liebknecht traveled to Lugau in his own constituency of 19: Stollberg after a mining disaster on 1 July 1867 killed 101 miners and attracted international attention.<sup>8</sup> The Social Democrats made even more political capital from a disaster in the mines run by the wealthy Conservative patron Baron Carl von Burgk-Roßthal, whose father had been a founding member of the conservatives' Saxon Association at mid-century. On 2 August 1869, 276 miners died in a fire-damp explosion in the sadly misnamed *Segen-Gottes* and *Neu-Hoffnung* mines.<sup>9</sup> When Social Democratic leaders participated in the Reichstag debates preceding passage of a new Industrial Code

<sup>8</sup> Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:214f. Cf. Mehring, *Geschichte*, 2:407f.; Zucker, "Bamberger," 211.

<sup>9</sup> StadtAD, 16.1.1, PA II, NL Burgk, Nr. 85; Helbing, *Marx*, 3, 10f., 24ff.

in 1869, no one could ignore the political implications of their calls for better enforcement of factory regulations, the ten-hour workday, banishment of Sunday work and child labor, coalition rights for trade unions, and—somewhat later—liability laws and invalids' protection.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, we get a better sense of why the Social Democratic message became so closely associated with the cause of revolution, and thus hateful to so many Germans, if we chart Germany's path into and out of war with France in 1870/71.

Two kinds of courage is what Bebel's and Liebknecht's stance against the Franco-German War required. These men were attacked by German patriots who soon basked in the glow of victory. They were also opposed by other socialists who supported Germany's "defensive" war in the west.<sup>11</sup> On 21 July 1870, less than a week after war was declared, Bebel and Liebknecht abstained in the Reichstag vote that approved 120 million Thaler in war credits. They declared that they could not support a war on behalf of the Hohenzollern dynasty and against the interests of workers in all nations. The context of their opposition changed in the first week of September 1870, when Prussian forces smashed Emperor Napoleon III's armies at Sedan and the French empire was replaced by a republic. Bebel rose in the Reichstag on 26 November to defend his vote against approving another 100,000 Thaler for the war.<sup>12</sup> Facing enraged opponents in the house who tried to silence him with cat-calls and scornful laughter, Bebel hit out at war profiteers and Bismarck's planned annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Two weeks later, in the special Reichstag sitting to approve the impending union of German states under the imperial crown, Bebel melded his anti-war and anti-national arguments in a way that made each seem more frightening. The German people, he declared, would soon come to understand "that they can expect nothing from their princes and governments, that they can rely only upon their own strength and determination." Germans, Bebel continued, had to draft a new constitution and abolish the monarchy. On 9 December 1870, Liebknecht was even more defiant. "It is now a struggle between democracy and absolutism," he declared; "the German question will not be settled in this Reichstag, it will be fought out between us on the battlefield."<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1871 Bebel once again attacked the new Reich and the "confiscatory war" against France. Now he added his admiration for the Paris Commune. From March to May 1871 the Communards had been able to establish a proto-socialist regime in Paris, made up largely of elected workers. From 16 to 28 May 1871 the Commune was suppressed in a rampage of urban warfare—the most brutal Europe experienced in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Again outrage greeted Bebel's words when he defended the Commune in the Reichstag on 25 May 1871.

<sup>10</sup> Seeber, "Wahlkämpfe," 246, 256.

<sup>11</sup> See BAml, 370–424.

<sup>12</sup> See "August Bebel Criticizes the Franco-Prussian War and the Annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in a Speech before the North German Reichstag (26 November 1870)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=673](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=673).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Armstrong, "Social Democrats," 507.

<sup>14</sup> See Merriman, *Massacre*.

A gulf had opened between Social Democrats and German burghers. The latter equated the violence unleashed by the Communards with the Great Terror of the French Revolution. Bebel's speech subsequently assumed prominence in polemics against the "red menace." In 1878 Bismarck declared that Bebel's words in May 1871 first convinced him that Social Democrats were the true enemies of state and society. Bebel's eye-opening candor was intentional:

Gentlemen, the efforts of the Commune may appear in your eyes to be reprehensible or . . . insane, but do not doubt for a moment that the whole European proletariat and all those who still carry the torch of freedom and liberty in their breast look to Paris. (Great amusement.) Gentlemen, even though at this moment [the] Paris [Commune] is being suppressed, then remember that the struggle in Paris is only a preliminary skirmish, that the main issue in Europe still lies before us, and that before too many decades have passed the battle-cry of the Parisian proletariat—"War on the palaces, Peace in the cottages, Death to misery and idleness!"—will become the battle cry of the entire European proletariat. (Amusement.)<sup>15</sup>

Wilhelm Liebknecht's distrust of parliamentarism was deeper and more persistent than Bebel's.<sup>16</sup> On 17 October 1867 Liebknecht announced his fundamental opposition to the North German Confederation—a "creation of violence" based on "the division, subjugation, and enfeeblement of Germany." He also decried the North German Reichstag as the "fig-leaf of absolutism," whereupon the right side of the house erupted with shouts of "Away from the podium!" and "What more can he say?"<sup>17</sup> Liebknecht slowly came around to Bebel's view that elections and parliamentary debates had a positive agitational effect. But his ambivalence was evident when he addressed a meeting of the Democratic Workers' Association of Berlin on 31 May 1869—the same day the Reichstag's electoral law was finally confirmed.<sup>18</sup> "Let us take part with all our energy, as we have done thus far, in the elections," he declared; but the ballot box on its own "can never be the cradle of the democratic state." Participating in the present Reichstag blunted the Social Democratic message. "Principles are indivisible . . . He who parliamentarizes with the enemy is fencing in the air."<sup>19</sup>

Bebel disagreed. When protected by other civil liberties, universal suffrage was the foundation of the party's future success.<sup>20</sup> In a series of speeches in 1871, Bebel built his argument on three pillars: the glaring discrepancy between votes cast for Social Democratic candidates and Reichstag seats won; the unfairness of the one-Thaler suffrage threshold in Saxon Landtag elections; and the prospect that Social Democrats would gain influence even in municipal parliaments if the working

<sup>15</sup> *SBDR*, 2:921 (25.5.71); *BARuS*, 1:150; *SBDR*, 1:70 (Bismarck, 17.9.78).

<sup>16</sup> *BAmL*, 367–9.

<sup>17</sup> *SBDR*, *Norddeutscher Bund* 1:452 (17.10.67).

<sup>18</sup> "Electoral Law for the Reichstag of the North German Confederation (31 May 1869)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=597](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=597).

<sup>19</sup> For an extended excerpt see "Wilhelm Liebknecht on Elections to Parliament as a Means of Agitation (31 May 1869)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1842](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1842).

<sup>20</sup> *BAmL*, 427–87.

classes were not excluded by local suffrage laws.<sup>21</sup> These points were emphasized when Bebel drew up a comprehensive report on the Social Democrats' activity in the 1871–74 Reichstag session. "Man for man," Social Democrats had to follow their election battle plan.<sup>22</sup> Their first victory was not long in coming.

## RESPONSES

Prussian and Saxon authorities incrementally escalated their anti-socialist campaigns during the years 1869–73. Up-ticks of repression followed the formation of Social Democratic trade unions, strikes and other labor disputes, the holding of party congresses, the founding of new party organs, and election campaigns at the local, regional, and national level. Public enthusiasm at the outcome of the Franco-German War may have contributed to the socialists' relatively poor showing in the Reichstag elections of 3 March 1871, but other factors were more important.

In the spring of 1870 Social Democrats in Saxony were already beginning to rally their supporters for Reichstag elections expected in late August. "The conquest of a few seats in Saxony can be counted as a given," wrote Bebel; "whether we will also succeed with a candidate in the rest of northern Germany—I think that's doubtful."<sup>23</sup> Saxon authorities and rival party leaders hoped the cold war between Eisenachers and Lassalleans would hamper the socialist election campaign.<sup>24</sup> When real war broke out on 19 July, these differences initially became more pronounced. Even the Eisenachers were divided. Their central committee in Braunschweig disavowed Bebel's and Liebknecht's opposition to what they believed was a defensive war.<sup>25</sup> After the French defeat at Sedan on 1–2 September, however, all Social Democrats agreed that Germany was fighting a dynastic war of conquest.<sup>26</sup> The Braunschweig committee issued a manifesto condemning the war outright on 5 September, with immediate repercussions. Accused of violating the laws of association, the committee members were transported in chains and under military guard on a thirty-six-hour journey to the fortress of Lötzen in East Prussia. Bismarck had no qualms about the legality of such measures. Germany was on a war footing and anti-war protests stiffened French resistance: "Whether they cost the Fatherland 10 or 10,000 human lives is without influence on the question of law," he wrote. The state had an "obligation to render harmless the intentional or unintentional confederates of the enemy."<sup>27</sup>

Saxon authorities were uncertain how to proceed. In August, Leipzig Police Director Christian Rüder, acting in accord with the wishes of Leipzig's city council,

<sup>21</sup> BARuS, 1:152–83. Cf. *ibid.*, 1:637 (14.6.71); BAmL, 389; Czok, "Ausgangspositionen," 603; Schaarschmidt, *Geschichte*, 68f. See "August Bebel, Reichstag Speech (8 November 1871)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=604](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=604).

<sup>22</sup> [Bebel], *Thätigkeit . . . 1871–1874*, esp. 63–6.

<sup>23</sup> Letter of 8.2.70, BARuS, 1:575.

<sup>24</sup> Eichmann, 4/6.2.70, PAAAB, Sachsen 41; Crowe, 6.7.70, PRO, FO 68/152.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of 29.7.70, in Dominick, *Liebknecht*, 195. Cf. Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:326f.

<sup>26</sup> Liebknecht to Wilhelm Bracke, 5.9.70, cited in Dominick, *Liebknecht*, 200.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of 28.9.70, BWiA, 4:547–50; cf. AB-PrStMin, 6/1:200f. (4.10.70); BAmL, 389.



urged War Minister Fabrice to ban all Social Democratic assemblies. Rüder also recommended banning *Der Volksstaat*.<sup>28</sup> But Fabrice and Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz felt that circumstances did not demand such overt repression.<sup>29</sup> Fabrice rejected Rüder's request by noting that martial law was not yet in force in Leipzig. Nostitz agreed, citing §12 of the Saxon Association Law, which already permitted police to ban public assemblies "in cases of immediate danger to public peace, order, and security." Bebel had to be vigilant nonetheless. On 20 September 1870 Nostitz instructed his regional governors to ban all assemblies in which sympathy might be expressed for the Braunschweig anti-war manifesto or against "the ultimate aims of the war."<sup>30</sup> This general ban did not satisfy Bismarck. Prussian ministers expressed dissatisfaction that "the Saxon government is taking no action against Bebel and Liebknecht in Leipzig."<sup>31</sup>

A month later Bismarck applied more pressure. He asked why the Prussian "state of siege" could not be extended to Saxony. Berlin Police President Lothar von Wurmb—Prussia's Civil Commissar during the occupation of 1866—turned up the heat too. Wurmb knew as well as anyone that lower civil servants in Saxony were unlikely to respond positively to Prussian pressure. But he was frustrated that Bebel's and Liebknecht's immunity from prosecution was repeatedly extended as the Reichstag session lasted into the first week of December 1870. Liebknecht recalled that during this "gallows period" Dresden authorities showed no haste to arrest them. But "Berlin pressed, and so Dresden gave in."<sup>32</sup>

Germany's victory over France generated feelings of pride even among Saxony's working classes. Yet when the war had first broken out, the mood in government circles was "very depressed" for fear that the "portentous consequences of a war" would give "the democrats a new weapon with which to attack the dynasties."<sup>33</sup> Bebel knew such fear was justified: "The present war, contrary to the intentions of the authorities, is playing into our hands. If the party were doing as well everywhere as it is here in Leipzig and in Saxony generally, then we would have won by now. Unfortunately things look miserable in Prussia, . . . and in southern Germany people have been too much swept away by chauvinism."<sup>34</sup> News of the capitulation of Paris in January 1871 and the provisional peace accord in February produced as much anxiety as excitement among the Saxon population. "The Imperial idea has no hope of generating much of an echo here, and people find in it no compensation for the great sacrifice of lives . . . [and] the expected increase in taxes."<sup>35</sup> The unusually cold winter of 1870/71 and high unemployment contributed to the public malaise, as did grumbling about war profiteers and generals rewarded with

<sup>28</sup> See Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:296.

<sup>29</sup> Nostitz-Wallwitz circular (copy), [19.7.70], SHStAD, Mdi 10975; Schröder, "Fünf-Thaler-Affäre," 59–68.

<sup>30</sup> SHStAD, KHMSL 244.

<sup>31</sup> AB-PrStMin, 6/I:200f. (28.9.70).

<sup>32</sup> Liebknecht's introduction (1894) to *Hochverrats-Prozeß*, 12f.

<sup>33</sup> Count Ludwig Paar, 15.7.70, HHStAV, PAV 38.

<sup>34</sup> BARuS, 1:577 (18.11.70).

<sup>35</sup> Paar, 31.12.70, HHStAV, PAV/38 (cf. reports of 22.7.70, 22.12.70, 4/11.2.71 in HHStAV, PAV/38 and PAV/39); Crowe, 16.7.70, 9.12.70, and Burnley, 16/31.1.71, PRO, FO 68/152 and FO 68/153 respectively; Paumgarten, 8.1.71, BHStAM II, MA 2844; Eichmann, 9.12.70, 8.4.71, PAAAB, Sachsen 41; Richter, *Meinung*, 143–53.

funds from the French indemnity. In Leipzig, "every soldier who came home from the campaign brought with him the sentiments of a German as distinct from those of a more narrow nationalism. But there is no counting on the long duration of such a sentiment."<sup>36</sup>

House searches and the confiscation of Social Democratic printed matter accelerated during the winter of 1870/71. Once the Reichstag campaign was formally underway it became unconstitutional to outlaw socialist rallies. But many were banned anyway or dissolved as soon as the main speaker began his address. The regional governor in Leipzig noted that his local officials were unsure whether all rallies could be banned during the campaign or only those in which anti-war statements were expected. His superiors in Dresden replied immediately: all socialist meetings could be assumed to oppose the war. Therefore police powers should be used extensively even during the campaign.<sup>37</sup> The most celebrated action was the arrest on 17 December 1870 of Bebel, Liebknecht, and Adolf Hepner, an editor on the staff of *Der Volksstaat*.<sup>38</sup> They were charged with having made "preparations for high treason."<sup>39</sup> The "incriminating evidence" the authorities dredged up did not make the long-delayed High Treason trial (1872) any less farcical. Nor was it possible to prevent Bebel's and Liebknecht's nomination for the Reichstag elections of March 1871. Sitting in a Leipzig jail, at least they would not be able to participate in their own campaigns.

Or so it was believed. In fact, Bebel and Liebknecht stayed in close touch with their campaign organizers from their jail cells, offering encouragement and tactical advice.<sup>40</sup> Then, on 28 March, Bebel heard the key being turned in the lock of his cell. After 101 days in solitary confinement, during which he "froze like a dog" in a cell "teeming with vermin," he was released, as were Liebknecht and Hepner. Two days later the Braunschweig committee was also freed. Liebknecht described these events to Karl Marx: "The Prussian government wanted to paralyze us during the war and during the election campaign; naturally the Saxon government willingly lent itself to the tyrants' orders . . . The 'evidence' was easily trumped up." Switching to English to emphasize his final point, Liebknecht wrote, "Such is life in *New-Germany!*"<sup>41</sup>

After his release from prison Bebel headed straight to Berlin, where he inveighed against the draft constitution on 3 April 1871. Kept under surveillance night and day, Bebel later recalled that he was treated like a common criminal by Berlin's political police: "pettiness and maliciousness" were the order of the day. Bebel added that "we later accustomed ourselves to this as Saxon Landtag deputies in Dresden."<sup>42</sup> What he could not have known was that within a few weeks, Bismarck in Berlin and Friesen in Dresden had come to the conclusion that Social

<sup>36</sup> Crowe, 15.11.71, PRO, FO 68/154.

<sup>37</sup> KHM Burgsdorff to MdI, 8.2.71; reply (draft), 15.2.71; SHStAD, MdI 10975.

<sup>38</sup> See BAmL, 404-14.

<sup>39</sup> Wurmb to Pr. MdI Eulenburg, 14.9.70, cited in Schröder, "Affäre," 61.

<sup>40</sup> Letter of 8.1.71, BARuS, 1:579-81; Liebknecht letter of 17.1.71, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:374-81.

<sup>41</sup> Letter of 1.4.71, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:382 (original emphasis).

<sup>42</sup> BAmL, 414f.

Democracy was best combated as a criminal rather than a political movement.<sup>43</sup> That conclusion was wrong, but its ramifications were far-reaching.

The Reichstag elections of 3 March 1871 were held before the Communards had seized Paris or Bebel had publicly defended them. The French connection was exploited anyway. The Conservative spokesman Hermann Wagener claimed that the French consul in Vienna had thanked Bebel and Liebknecht for their efforts on behalf of the French Republic. Allegedly Bebel and Liebknecht had even received votes in elections to the French National Assembly.<sup>44</sup> More important than these “revelations,” election day coincided exactly with public celebration of the preliminary peace accord with France, which had been ratified on 26 February. On 1 March Kaiser Wilhelm and his troops paraded down the Champs Élysée. Hence Germans would have awoken on 3 March to read newspaper descriptions and pore over lithographs depicting these events. Voters went to the polls with all their senses attuned to the patriotic message: they saw flags waving from public buildings; they heard church bells pealing and a 101-gun salute booming; they felt the overdue warmth of a March day signaling Germany’s bright future. For good measure, before the run-off elections were completed, forty-three captured French cannon were put on display in the courtyard of Dresden’s Zwinger palace. Students at the Dresden Polytechnic staged a torchlight parade celebrating Barbarossa’s awakening from his slumber. A statue of Germania was unveiled in Dresden’s Altmarkt.<sup>45</sup>

These efforts to contain the revolutionary threat didn’t work. Or not as well as patriots hoped.<sup>46</sup> During the election campaign, Saxon Progressives had recognized that their tacit approval of anti-socialist repression and Germany’s unification undercut their liberal principles. The Conservatives were disorganized and complacent, hampered by a dearth of suitable candidates. Nevertheless, Conservative-National Liberal agreements not to field rival candidates helped Conservative fortunes, as did the new Electoral Association for the City of Dresden.<sup>47</sup> Such agreements would have been unheard of in 1869. Conservatives were also happy to rely on the support of Saxon civil servants. As one socialist organizer wrote to Liebknecht, “in the small towns, whatever is said and done by the mayor, the city counselors, the factory owners and, in rural areas, by the justices of the peace and the police, is taken by the mass of the people as a *command*.”<sup>48</sup> Yet authorities in Dresden were worried—embarrassed, even—that their police force was stretched too thin. Forced to guard a “small army” (18,000) of French prisoners of war, they lacked the manpower to undertake “enough” house searches and monitor “enough” socialist rallies.

<sup>43</sup> Bismarck, *Werke* (2004), Abt. III, 1:118f.

<sup>44</sup> BAml, 398f.

<sup>45</sup> Richter, *Geschichte*, 9–12; Paar, 4/11/19/22/25/28.2.71, 6/7/9/13/25.3.71, HHStAV, PAV/38.

<sup>46</sup> Paar, 11.2.71 and passim, HHStAV, PAV/38; StadtAD, 16.1.1, PA II, NL Burgk, Nr. 85; Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe,” 33–8; BAml, 409–11.

<sup>47</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 865a.

<sup>48</sup> Carl Demmler to Liebknecht, 2.4.71 (original emphasis), Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:381; cf. Burnley, 31.1.71, PRO, FO 68/153.

Social Democrats fielded candidates in eighteen of twenty-three Saxon constituencies. These included candidates who ran in two or three constituencies, candidates who later joined left-liberal caucuses in the Reichstag, and members of the Braunschweig committee who still sat in jail. Most of these candidates attracted fewer than 1,500 votes.<sup>49</sup> SPD leaders had no illusions about the effect of their anti-war stance among bourgeois voters. Therefore they concentrated their efforts on the three “winnable” constituencies of 17: Glauchau-Meerane (Bebel), 18: Zwickau (Schraps), and 19: Stollberg (Liebknecht). As Bebel wrote from his jail cell, it was a matter “of saving what could be saved” in difficult circumstances: the party “could not seek new conquests before we know whether we can hold onto what we have now.” Bebel’s tactical advice included holding popular assemblies only in the last two weeks before the poll and refuting opponents’ claims that Social Democrats were ineligible for election while in prison. For the entire Saxon campaign Bebel estimated that no more than 600 Marks was available. In the Zittau region, modest party activities were made possible only because members were asked to contribute one Thaler each to the campaign—a sum that exceeded the combined weekly wages of hand-weaving families in the region. Publicans were coerced by local authorities or employers to deny meeting rooms to Social Democrats, who tried to respond by spreading the word at rallies organized by other parties. Often they tried to disrupt them and have the police shut them down. One socialist was allegedly thrown three times out of the same meeting.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Bebel wrote to one of his comrades that “you can only imagine how it boosts my spirits to see the battle go forward as I sit here behind iron bars watching the clouds roll by.”<sup>51</sup>

Saxon National Liberals believed that their role as champions of national unification made it unnecessary for them to strike local electoral alliances with Progressives and Conservatives. But their vindication on one front made National Liberals vindictive on another. Soon they were “belching fire and flame.”<sup>52</sup> The title of one of their anti-socialist pamphlets said it all: *The Red Spectre of Social Democracy in Germany, or: Those Without a Fatherland. The Machinations of Bebel and Comrades*.<sup>53</sup> The National Liberals’ hope for substantial gains over their showing in 1867 was not misplaced.

Conservatives, in the guise of Federalist-Constitutionalists, nominated official candidates in just twelve Saxon constituencies. Some of their biggest stars did not fare well. Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz ran as a Conservative candidate in 14: Borna but was defeated in the run-off ballot by a Heidelberg professor who won with Social Democratic support. Ludwig von Zehmen lost in 7: Meißen to a joint Progressive-National Liberal candidate. And Ludwig Haberkorn was soundly beaten by a liberal estate owner in 1: Zittau. A contributor to the pro-Prussian *Grenzboten* rejoiced that “the most radical opponents of German unity have been crushed.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” Table 5; Schröder, “Grunde,” 8; other sources listed below.

<sup>50</sup> Schwarzbach, *Geschichte*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> BAml, 410.

<sup>52</sup> Liebknecht, *Briefe*, 1:377.

<sup>53</sup> *Gespens*, appended to Paar, 30.8.71, HHStAV, PAV/38; cf. Boettcher, *Stephani*, 114; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:316f.

<sup>54</sup> *Gb* 30, I. Sem. (1871): 1:443.

Those opponents included the Social Democrats, who saw their Saxon contingent in the Reichstag shrink from five deputies to just two. However, the number of votes cast for socialist candidates in Saxony rose substantially over 1867: they won over 42,000 votes, almost 20 percent of the total.

Nationally, almost four million Germans went to the polls on 3 March 1871—a participation rate of 51 percent. About 124,000 votes were cast for ninety-three socialist candidates, representing just over 3 percent of the popular vote.<sup>55</sup> Two socialists were elected, both in Saxony: August Bebel and Reinhold Schrapf. Schrapf soon gravitated to the Progressive Party, leaving Bebel as the only official socialist in the 1871 Reichstag. All but two of Saxony's twenty-three constituencies were won by liberals.<sup>56</sup>

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After March 1871 the war against “inner enemies” of the Reich took on sharper contours. The appearance of the Paris Commune and its brutal suppression resonated throughout Europe. The National Liberals' *Constitutionelle Zeitung* in Dresden served as a barometer to these events. The Communards were “raging assassins,” and only Bebel was “insolent enough to defend these *Unmenschen* in the Reichstag.”<sup>57</sup> Bismarck preferred action to rhetoric: only two weeks after Bebel's defense of the Paris Commune in the Reichstag, he instructed the Prussian ambassador to Austria-Hungary to open discussions with Vienna about how to foster international cooperation in the struggle against Social Democracy. Bismarck referred to “communistic workers' associations . . . in the Saxon factory districts.” Over the course of forty-eight hours he instructed his ambassadors to convey similar messages to authorities in Florence, London, St. Petersburg, Brussels—and Dresden. For government leader Richard von Friesen, he sketched an ominous future in which the international threat of revolution and Bebel's power base in Saxony appeared together. Bebel's election in Dresden was a symptom of Social Democracy's pervasiveness “and a warning not to remain inactive in response to it.”

<sup>55</sup> See RT election maps in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. The inner circle in each constituency represents the number of voters who cast a ballot; the outer circle represents all eligible electors (that is, *potential* voters): by comparing the size of the two circles one can see the approximate percentage turnout. The different parties' share of votes cast is indicated by the colors in the inner circle. Constituency winners are indicated by the background color of the constituency. These conventions are used for all maps from LRTW, 1871–1912. For the names and number of RT constituencies, see Map 2.1 and other maps in the Online Supplement. See also “Elections to the German Reichstag (1871–1890): A Statistical Overview,” which lists, for each national election, the number of votes won by each party, its share of the vote, its number of seats won, and its share of seats won: GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1850](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1850).

<sup>56</sup> Eight NLs with 22.4 percent of the vote, 8 Progressives with 27 percent, 5 other liberals with 13.1 percent. On NLs and LLs in 1871, see Paar, 9/25.3.71, HHStAV, PAV/38; Biedermann, *Leben*, vol. 2, ch. 18; Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, ch. 8; Boettcher, *Stephani*, ch. 7. DKP/FKP candidates won 8 percent in Saxony. These figures are open to interpretation because party designations were in flux and reporting was spotty. Cf. ZSSL 54 (1908): 171–80; LRTW, 52, and Karte 1871; RWA, 89; Specht/Schwabe, *Reichstagswahlen*, 218ff.; Ritter, “Wahlen,” 33, 43; Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” 63; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 109f.; Liebscher, *Sachsen*; BAmL, 410f.; Richter, *Meinung*, 152.

<sup>57</sup> CZ, 21.3.71, 12.4.71, 7.6.71; Herrmann, “Stellung,” 38, 59; Reichert, “Haltung.”

After noting that the "Saxon government stands as close to these questions and dangers as we do," Bismarck asked Friesen whether he was prepared to share with Prussian authorities the "fruits of criminal investigations 'about the extent and the aims of Bebel's party' in particular constituencies and to join us in considering what can be done . . . to meet these threats."<sup>58</sup>

By the summer of 1871 Friesen and Saxon Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz had become receptive to Bismarck's plan for harsher police measures and new legislation.<sup>59</sup> They stressed that the Reich Criminal Code was inadequate to the emergency. In Friesen's view, this deficiency was responsible for the "abominations" propagated by Social Democrats in the Reichstag and the press.<sup>60</sup> When the socialists in Dresden bedecked their headquarters with red flags—which the anti-socialist press declared might frighten oxen and roosters but, surely, not government authorities—Nostitz grew more frustrated. Large socialist rallies and the holding of the party's annual congress in Dresden in mid-August 1871 prompted bullish attempts at repression. While Saxon authorities waited for any opportunity to shut down the congress, Bebel parried their efforts by concentrating his comments on the ten-hour workday and the demand for universal suffrage for municipal elections. When it came time for the congress delegates to show their support for the Paris Commune, they did so simply by rising to their feet in silence.<sup>61</sup>

After 1871, police and civil servants in Prussia, Austria, and Germany's other federal states shared information about the progress of the Social Democratic movement, and none of them wanted to be seen as dilatory. In early 1875, after Kaiser Wilhelm read a report about the Bavarians' alleged success against Social Democracy, he wrote in the margin, "Why aren't we just as active against the reds?"<sup>62</sup> Did the Saxons see the same threats and opportunities? A long memorandum Nostitz sent to Friesen on Hallowe'en 1871 depicted the red spectre as more frightening than ever.<sup>63</sup> "The progress that has been made by the Social Democratic movement in the last few years," wrote Nostitz, "already endangers public safety to a significant degree." As evidence he cited communications from municipal authorities who believed that "the possible re-emergence of a revolutionary movement in France will also be used by Social Democracy in Germany as a means to revolutionary action."<sup>64</sup> Nostitz conceded that Germany's industrial development no longer made it possible to withdraw the workers' right of coalition or the civil liberties encapsulated in the present press and association laws. "Nevertheless, the existing nature of the state and the reputation of its authorities and their subordinate organs

<sup>58</sup> Bismarck, *Werke* (2004), Abt. III, 1:117–24, 221–2, 130–1, 229–31.

<sup>59</sup> See Pöls, *Sozialistenfrage*, 30–2; Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 26ff.; Kampffmeyer/Altmann, *Sozialistengesetz*, 74ff.; Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:296–9.

<sup>60</sup> For this and the following, Paumgarten, 11.6.71, 2.7.71, 13/20/24.8.71, BHStAM II, MA 2844.

<sup>61</sup> Schmidt, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 34f.

<sup>63</sup> Nostitz to Friesen, 31.10.71, SHStAD, MdAA 1441/1. Cf. Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> Nostitz to all regional governors (draft), 28.6.71, and for the following; SHStAD, Mdl 10975/1–2; Schaarschmidt, *Geschichte*, 79–84.

requires more emphatic protection than the provisions of the new Criminal Code currently provide." Efforts to meet the threat had failed in the courts: "almost daily," socialist agitators "preach[ed] revolution and the violent overthrow of the existing institutions of state."

Nostitz was bending the truth. In a previous memorandum to his regional governors, Nostitz had used less apocalyptic language. He advised police, when they monitored socialist rallies, "to avoid premature or provocative interventions" and to respond to "possible transgressions of legal restrictions" with "tact and discretion." Moreover, during 1871 Saxon police had successfully prosecuted numerous socialist editors and traveling speakers, charging them with offences against the monarchy, religion, and Saxony's association law.<sup>65</sup> In 1871 enough meetings were banned, newspapers confiscated, and socialists imprisoned that Liebknecht published a series of articles in *Der Volksstaat* under the rubric "Socialist Baiting," in which he posed the question, "Do we have a Fatherland?"<sup>66</sup> When Bebel welcomed Social Democratic delegates to their nation-wide congress in Dresden in August 1871, he took note that it was meeting in the capital of the state in which "Social Democracy is most vigorously repressed."<sup>67</sup>

Was the Reich Criminal Code too lax? Bebel in November 1871 declared that German unification had made it easier to suppress Social Democracy in Saxony. During a Reichstag speech in which he also denounced Bismarck's rule as "sheer Caesarism," he declared that he was no longer impressed with the "genial" style of Saxon repression: "The persecution to which our party has been subjected in Saxony—where the laws, already reactionary, have been exploited in the most arbitrary, reactionary way against us with respect to freedom of assembly, association, and press—has shown us that . . . the small states . . . are no longer able to resist the pressure on them from Berlin."<sup>68</sup> Nostitz so firmly believed that the existing laws against Social Democracy needed to be stiffened that he eagerly endorsed Bismarck's and Friesen's earlier suggestions that the relevant articles of the Reich Criminal Code be reconsidered.<sup>69</sup> Saxony could even show the way, Nostitz suggested, by applying some articles of its own Criminal Code from 1855. Otherwise, "the people's respect for the law will gradually become completely confused, . . . the power of the state will be shaken, and the organs of authority will find it more difficult—and perhaps even impossible—to carry out their official functions."

The second half of Nostitz's memorandum to Friesen is historically no less important than the first. Switching from the major key of repression to the minor key of reform, it illustrates the importance Saxon authorities attached to fostering social and economic reforms in tune with Saxony's special circumstances.

<sup>65</sup> Burnley, PRO, FO 68/154; cf. Stöbe, *Streik*; Strauss/Finsterbusch, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 19–22.

<sup>66</sup> *Volksstaat*, 5/8.7.71. <sup>67</sup> BAml., 427.

<sup>68</sup> *SBDR* 1:183f. (8.11.71); "August Bebel, Reichstag Speech (8 November 1871)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=604](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=604).

<sup>69</sup> Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 26–8; Bismarck to Wilhelm, 1.4.72, Bismarck, *Werke* (2004), Abt. III, 1:311; Pöls, *Sozialistenfrage*, 36ff.

Remedies to Social Democratic heresies that Nostitz believed “worthy of further consideration” included the strict enforcement of federal regulations against the employment of children, further restrictions on Sunday work, and the introduction of more factory inspectors. Setting legal limits to the “normal” workday was generally accepted in Germany as impossible, Nostitz wrote, but this reform should not be rejected out of hand. The School Bill being drafted at that time offered good prospects for improving the availability of continuing education for youths. And municipal authorities in Saxony’s more heavily industrialized districts had already taken positive steps in the direction of establishing courts of arbitration to settle disputes between employers and employees.

Nostitz’s list of positive reforms did not stop there. The provision of more housing for workers in and around Saxony’s industrial centers—with affordable rents and better sanitation—was urgently needed. Progress was being made through enforcement of building ordinances and the efforts of voluntary associations at the local level. Above all, “improvement of the condition of the working classes” lay in the hands of employers. The latter had not provided as much care for their workers as was compatible with “the interests of the workers themselves and the expansion of the industrial enterprises in question.” Therefore greater effort was necessary to “motivate and encourage” employers—for example by rewarding best practices with state decorations and heeding the counsel of industry experts.

The two parts of Nostitz’s memorandum, in short, reflected Saxon authorities’ hesitant endorsement of repression *and* reform. Their calls for stricter enforcement of existing laws did not preclude open acknowledgment that some of Social Democracy’s demands might be legitimate. At the time Bismarck had little interest in such proposals. He revealed his limited understanding of the workers’ movement in the 1870s when he observed that dissatisfaction among the “propertyless” could best be alleviated if they abandoned their “claims to life’s pleasures.” The Saxons offered a more insightful appraisal. Nostitz’s memorandum illuminates the constraints under which the authoritarian state tried—and often failed—to reconcile harsh responses to a perceived political threat and more benevolent reactions to actual socio-economic hardship. The state’s ambivalence had implications for election battles that were about to heat up.

## RED SAXONY? THE SHOCK OF JANUARY 1874

In no other federal state besides Saxony has Social Democracy gained more ground and become a greater power, and therefore the government of no other state besides Saxony is better able to make and defend proposals for remedy.

—Otto von Bismarck, March 1874<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Bismarck to Pr. Minister of War Georg von Kameke (draft), 3.3.74, BAP, RKA 1292/2.



There is no such thing as the State  
 And no one exists alone;  
 Hunger allows no choice  
 To the citizen or the police;  
 We must love one another or die.

—W. H. Auden<sup>71</sup>

In 1872 a Saxon court added to Bebel's two-year conviction for high treason a nine-month sentence for *lèse majesté*. Its verdict stripped the SPD leader of his Reichstag seat. On the day he began serving his term Bebel issued an open letter to his constituents, calling on them to reward the court's high-handedness by re-electing him.<sup>72</sup> In a Reichstag by-election in January 1873 they did exactly that, delivering Bebel 4,000 more votes than he had received in March 1871. When the Reichstag session began, Bebel wrote to the Saxon ministry of justice asking permission to take his seat at least while the Berlin parliament was in session.<sup>73</sup> His appeal was rejected out of hand. Bebel and most Social Democrats in Saxon jails remained under lock and key. However, the Reichstag elections of January 1874 delivered a shock to the system—a shock that involved much more than Bebel's personal fortunes. How did socialists achieve this breakthrough?

#### THE CAMPAIGN

The celebrated Leipzig trial of Bebel, Liebknecht, and Hepner in March 1872 significantly brightened the Eisenachers' prospects in Saxony.<sup>74</sup> During that trial, these men were given many opportunities to defend their party's ideology and aims. They later reflected on the irony that the huge volume of material entered into the trial record by the prosecution, drawn from the Social Democrats' party congresses, newspapers, and other publications, provided one of the best collections of socialist writing existing at the time. The trial was unusually long by the standards of the day, and when the verdict of guilty was handed down against Bebel and Liebknecht no one was surprised. After all, the jury comprised mainly estate owners, other farmers, foresters, and businessmen.<sup>75</sup> More astounding were the long, articulate statements Bebel and Liebknecht had offered in their own defense. For those already inclined to see the authoritarian state as having over-reacted to the socialists' challenge in 1870 and 1871, Bebel's and Liebknecht's restraint made a positive impression. Other observers cheered the fact that, with nothing to lose, these leaders unveiled the ultimate goals of their party—for example, dispensing with the euphemism of "the people's state" (*Volksstaat*) to signify a republic. A month after the trial was

<sup>71</sup> W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939" (1940).

<sup>72</sup> BAmL, 451f., 458.

<sup>73</sup> BARuS, 1:584f. See §§30–31 of the "Constitution of the German Empire (16 April 1871)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=2782](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2782).

<sup>74</sup> *Gb* 31, I. Sem. (1872): 1:402–8. Cf. Burnley, 12.4.72, PRO, FO68/155. See "Socialists on Trial for Treason (1872)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7 (image): [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1436](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1436).

<sup>75</sup> *Hochverrats-Prozeß*, 62.

concluded, the socialist cause was given a boost when the revered Progressive leader Johann Jacoby announced that he was joining the Social Democrats in solidarity with the convicted pair.<sup>76</sup> (Hepner was acquitted). Through 1872 and 1873, as Bebel and Liebknecht sat in the relatively comfortable confines of Hubertusburg castle, other demonstrations of support followed. To these continuing “provocations” Saxons responded with a mixture of concern and complacency.

Characteristic of this ambivalence was Interior Minister Nostitz’s reaction to what he called the “*indignation meeting*” [*sic*] organized by Dresden socialists after Bebel’s and Liebknecht’s conviction.<sup>77</sup> When Nostitz was asked in April 1872 what could be done to prevent such “presumptuous” affronts—including anonymous threats against members of the Leipzig jury—the interior minister stated that the Social Democrats’ agitation had “opened the eyes of many politically exalted [Landtag] deputies.” Yet until a “sharpening” of the Reich Criminal Code became possible he did not want to “create more martyrs.” Nostitz’s unwillingness to provoke the socialists can also be ascribed in part to the Landtag’s refusal to increase the Saxon gendarmerie. A recent request for an increased contingent of twenty-five men had been refused by the lower house. “Dresden, with 177,000 inhabitants, has only one policeman for every thousand souls!”

It is crucial to distinguish between Reichstag and Landtag elections when surveying Social Democracy’s advance in the 1870s (and thereafter). Everyone in Saxony knew that the right-wing parties’ strong showing in the Reichstag elections of March 1871 would not easily be replicated. This became evident during the campaigns preceding Landtag elections of October 1871 and September 1873 (when one-third of Landtag constituencies were contested each time).<sup>78</sup> Again eminent Conservatives failed to win election, including the decorated councilman Gustav Ackermann in Dresden. “The Conservatives have too few competent forces, and these still often refuse to take part in the elections.” Overall, turnout in October 1871 averaged just 24 percent in the kingdom, and only half that in the big cities (see Table 3.2).

The liberals fared marginally better than the Conservatives. They still enjoyed a slim majority in the lower house, forty-two to thirty-eight over the Conservatives. Yet the Landtag suffrage ensured that the Conservatives, who had won just one-quarter of the popular vote in the Reichstag elections of March 1871, won almost half of the Landtag vote the following October.<sup>79</sup>

For the Landtag elections of September 1873 the Saxon government took a more active role in the campaign.<sup>80</sup> It sought to compensate for what Justice Minister

<sup>76</sup> Silbner, *Jacoby*, 492–4.

<sup>77</sup> For this and the following comment about Dresden police, Paumgarten, 21/30.4.72, BHStAM II, MA 2845.

<sup>78</sup> For the following see SHStAD, Mdl 5329–31; ZSSL 51 (1905): 2ff.; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 110–19; Paumgarten, 24.8.71, 5.10.71, 1.12.71, BHStAM II, MA 2844.

<sup>79</sup> In the Landtag elections of 1871, 1873, and 1875, one-third of constituencies were contested each time. See Plates 4 and 5. For maps showing all rural (left) and all urban (right) constituencies contested over this timespan, see maps in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>80</sup> For the following, see Paumgarten, 21.8.73, 13/19/21/27.9.73, BHStAM II, MA 2846; Solms, 12/22/23.9.73, PAAAB, Sachsen 44; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 113–15.

**Table 3.2.** Saxon Landtag Elections, 1871, 1873, 1875

Constituencies contested	Total votes cast	Cons. votes won	Cons. share of vote	Cons. seats won	Liberal votes won	Liberal share of vote	Liberal seats won
Type/(no.)	(no.)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)
<b>2 October 1871</b>							
Large city (4)	1,804	406	22.5	0	1,369	75.9	4
Other urban (7)	5,053	2,344	46.4	3	2,346	46.4	4
Rural (15)	14,295	7,546	52.8	8	6,205	43.4	7
Total (26)	21,152	10,296	48.7	11	9,920	46.9	15
<b>15 September 1873</b>							
Large city (4)	3,556	709	19.9	1	2,786	78.3	3
Other urban (8)	9,077	3,944	43.5	3	5,017	55.3	5
Rural (15)	17,649	12,375	70.1	12	4,544	25.7	3
Total (27)	30,282	17,028	56.2	16	12,347	40.8	11
<b>14 September 1875</b>							
Large city (2)	2,823	33	1.2	0	2,240	79.3	2
Other urban (10)	10,853	1,026	9.5	0	8,981	82.8	10
Rural (15)	21,664	11,880	54.8	7	8,294	38.3	8
Total (27)	35,340	12,939	36.6	7	19,515	55.2	20

*Notes:* Overall turnout rates were 24.2 percent (1871), 33.2 percent (1873), and 36.2 percent (1875). In 1871 all votes for liberal candidates were counted as "Liberal." In 1873 National Liberal candidates won 18.0 percent of the vote, Progressives 8.1 percent, and other liberals 14.7 percent. In 1875 NL candidates won 26.7 percent of the vote, Progressives 28.5 percent, and other liberals 1.8 percent.

*Sources:* ZSSL 51, no. 1 (1905): 2–12; SHStAD, Mdl 5329–31; Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 111–19; *SParl*, 180–214; SLTW, Tables 18, 21, 26. Some figures calculated by the author. Discrepancies arising from inaccurate party ascriptions, by-elections, etc., have been reconciled as far as possible.

Christian Wilhelm Ludwig (von) Abeken referred to as the lack of legal opportunities to constrain socialist activities and the dissemination of the party's propaganda.<sup>81</sup> At this time Abeken personified Saxon repression. Bebel described him as "a small, scraggy man with a cold, fanatical face," who reminded him of Torquemada, Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Abeken "would have fit well in this age," Bebel thought: "An extremely intelligent lawyer with the sharp, dry voice of a bureaucrat, . . . he defended the actions of his prosecutors and judges to the hilt."<sup>82</sup> When the courts did not deliver, Abeken and Interior Minister Nostitz turned to Saxony's civil service. Separate memoranda from their ministries urged Saxon officials to participate "actively" in the Landtag election.<sup>83</sup> These memoranda were not sent to city councils, which were considered too likely to support

<sup>81</sup> Abeken to Mdl, 31.7.73, SHStAD, Mdl 10976. Abeken was ennobled in June 1878.

<sup>82</sup> Bebel cited in Schmidt, "Zentralverwaltung," 118.

<sup>83</sup> Circular, 1.8.73, SHStAD, Mdl 5330.

liberals. Otherwise too, the anti-socialist campaign was undercut by tension among liberals, Conservatives, and the government. One observer claimed that at least three factions existed within the Conservative Party, which did not even deserve to be called a party "given its lack of unity."<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile Progressives and National Liberals were moving apart, and the government's *Leipziger Zeitung* declared a "fight to the finish" with the liberals. The election of National Liberals, it declared, would be "a disaster for Saxony."<sup>85</sup> Such intervention was seen by one diplomat as a sign that the Saxon government was in disarray: it "hurt more than helped itself by taking such a direct and unconcealed role" in the campaign, and it was "often served with *trop de zèle* by its own press organs." Yet "tolerable" elections in 1873 were still possible because the Landtag suffrage of 1868 isolated the industrial cities from rural constituencies where conservative influence still prevailed. The Conservatives fielded almost twice as many candidates as the National Liberals (12), and voter turnout was higher in the countryside (33 percent) than in the big cities (21 percent). For all these reasons the Conservatives improved their showing over 1871, though only marginally.

If we look ahead for a moment to 14 September 1875, when the third of three partial renewals of the Saxon Landtag took place, we can take stock of Landtag results after all eighty constituencies had been contested at least twice (together in 1869, then in 1871–73–75). At mid-decade the liberals in the house still enjoyed a majority (forty-five seats) over the Conservatives. However, this leftist group was now divided among three roughly equal factions: fifteen National Liberals, fourteen Progressives, and sixteen other liberals. The National Liberals and Progressives were less inclined to cooperate than at any time since 1869.

What of the socialists (still divided between Eisenachers and Lassalleans)? By 1875, Bebel's followers in Saxony had begun to recognize that they stood a chance of winning a Landtag seat in some heavily industrialized districts. Socialist candidates attracted 1,517 votes, a little over 4 percent of the total. Despite the one-Thaler tax threshold that excluded most workers, Bebel won 42 percent of the popular vote in the 14th urban constituency. That he lost this contest "pleased no one more than me," Bebel wrote, because he urgently needed to attend to his own business.<sup>86</sup> For Liebknecht, too, the life of a "vagabond agitator" was a hardship: the "lungs and voice-box occasionally register their own protest." But otherwise Bebel reported that "we can be very satisfied with the party's fortunes." Another sign of the times was Social Democracy's success in expanding its regional press, helped by the establishment of its own publishing house in 1872.<sup>87</sup> Subscriptions to *Der Volksstaat* rose from 2,790 in early 1871 to about 7,400 in early 1874.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Solms, 12/16/28/29.1.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1, and other sources listed below.

<sup>85</sup> LZ, 12.8.73, DJ, 21.8.73.

<sup>86</sup> SHStAD, MdI 5331; ZSSL 51 (1905): 4–5; Bebel to Engels, 21.9.75, BARuS, 1:597.

<sup>87</sup> Schröder/Kiesshauer, *Genossenschaftsbuchdruckerei*.

<sup>88</sup> Schröder, "Grunde," 9. On strikes: Machtan, *Streiks und Aussperrungen*, 31; Machtan, *Streiks*; Machtan, "Streikbewegung"; Boll, "Arbeitskampf," esp. Tables 6, 7; Schmidt, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 42.

Social Democracy's prospects were far brighter under universal manhood suffrage for national elections. In the Reichstag election campaign of 1874, Social Democrats in Saxony spared no effort to avenge their leaders' imprisonment: it was a question of honor.<sup>89</sup> They nominated candidates in all but one of Saxony's Reichstag constituencies (2: Löbau was the anomaly). Bebel ran in his old constituency of 17: Glauchau-Meerane but also in 11: Oschatz-Grimma, where he could only "show the flag," and in 12: Leipzig-City. Liebknecht ran in 20: Marienberg, hoping that his traditional support in 19: Stollberg would overspill the boundaries of "his" constituency. He was also nominated in 6: Dresden-County. In this relatively rural riding, Liebknecht had little chance of unseating the Conservative incumbent, but his supporters hoped his popularity would help the party attract new recruits north of the capital. Organization, discipline, and sacrifice were the party's watchwords. Some 11,000 copies of an election flyer were distributed in one constituency in the span of forty-eight hours. An "election surtax" of 2.5 Neugroschen per month—roughly the cost of five loaves of bread—was assessed on party members in Leipzig for the duration of the campaign.<sup>90</sup> Especially revealing is a seven-point "battle plan" drawn up for Liebknecht by Carl Demmler, who later represented the SPD in the Reichstag himself. After cataloguing the Social Democrats' inadequate organization and agitation in 1871, Demmler wrote that, next time, the party had to adopt more coherent tactics. The central points of Demmler's *Feldzugsplan* illustrate the precision with which the SPD now organized its grass-roots agitation:

3. At least 16–18 days before election day, 8–10,000 copies of an election manifesto *must* be in the hands of the central authority, which will then distribute them proportionally to the local committees. The latter have the obligation to circulate them locally but also in neighboring localities through trustworthy party comrades, who are to be paid.
4. Six days later, an election flyer should appear, in which all the election chicanery and false statements of opponents are immediately refuted; this flyer can also contain any necessary supplements to the election manifesto.
5. Six days after that, a second flyer will be distributed . . . [and] simultaneously . . . ballot slips will be distributed.
6. In the meantime the central authority will have signed up four talented speakers, who can agitate during the last four days before the election.<sup>91</sup>

As new envoys took up their posts in Dresden,<sup>92</sup> they all remarked on the intensity of Social Democratic agitation, even outside urban areas. Estimating that about two-thirds of the working-class population of Saxony (industrial and agricultural) were socialists, George Strachey reported to the Foreign Office in London that

<sup>89</sup> See [Bebel], *Thätigkeit . . . 1871–1874*.

<sup>90</sup> Schröder, "Wahlkämpfe," 41–3.

<sup>91</sup> Paraphrased from Demmler to Liebknecht, 13.8.73, in Liebknecht, *Briefe*, 1:514–16; cf. "Statistische Uebersicht" (1874), SHStAD, Mdl 865a.

<sup>92</sup> George Strachey for Britain, Count Eberhard zu Solms-Sonnenwalde for Prussia, Baron Rudolf von Gasser for Bavaria, Baron Karl von und zu Franckenstein for Austria.

“such strength becomes irresistible in districts where the villages as well as the towns are seats of manufacturing industry.” The Social Democrats, he continued, owed “less to their absolute and distributive force than to their electioneering and skill.” This “hated faction” had “made proper use of the classical English methods of electioneering.”<sup>93</sup> The Prussian and Austrian envoys agreed. Social Democrats had penetrated into the “factory, industrial, and mining villages,” where they had pressed their campaign with “great calm and confidence” and with “exemplary order.” They had intentionally lulled employers into a false sense of security. Among the thousands of miners employed by Baron Arthur Dathe von Burgk-Roßthal in the *Plauenscher Grund*—a mining district southwest of Dresden—“all workers were punctual and diligent, so that no one thought the people were paying any attention to the elections. On voting day, however, man for man, they all cast their ballots for the Social Democratic candidates.”<sup>94</sup>

Table 3.3 illustrates Social Democracy’s gains between March 1871 and January 1874 in Saxony and the Reich.

The most obvious feature of the 1874 election was the socialists’ core strength in Saxony. In January 1874, Saxony became Germany’s first federal state in which socialist candidates attracted more votes than those of any other party. They more than doubled their vote total from 1871. In the Reich, socialists more than tripled their vote, to over 350,000 in 1874. But the proportion of the popular vote won in Saxony and the Reich differed markedly. In the Reich, socialists won a little less than 7 percent of ballots cast in 1874, compared with 35 percent in Saxony. Now one of every four socialist voters in Germany lived in Saxony. Saxony’s share of Reichstag seats was greater still. Of nine Social Democrats elected nationally, six represented Saxony. All of these were elected in the relatively industrialized districts of the southwest. And all of them were followers of Bebel and Liebknecht.<sup>95</sup>

Whereas Social Democrats succeeded in mobilizing voters in all parts of the kingdom, Conservatives and National Liberals focused on avoiding rival candidacies and contesting “winnable” ridings. This strategy produced fewer three- or four-way contests in 1874 than in 1871. Anti-socialist solidarity was not watertight in the 1874 campaign, but it was still strong. In nineteen constituencies Social Democrats faced only one rival (see Table 3.4).<sup>96</sup>

The distinction between German Conservatives and Free Conservatives can be disregarded—in the Reich because the “New Conservative” faction was in flux, in Saxony because conservatives seldom differentiated between the two parties. Only a handful of Saxon conservatives preferred the Free Conservative label to emphasize

<sup>93</sup> Strachey, 17/20/31.1.74, 13.3.74, PRO, FO 215/34 (drafts), FO 68/158; flyers in SLUB, H. Sax. G., 199, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Solms, 16.1.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1; cf. Franckenstein, 31.1.74, HHStAV, PAV/40.

<sup>95</sup> SHStAD, MdI 865c; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 43.

<sup>96</sup> See the map for RT elections of 1874 in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. See *ibid.* for maps showing party bastions in the RT elections of 1871, 1874, and 1877. Party bastions are defined as constituencies where one party won at least 60 percent of valid ballots cast in the main election (i.e. not the run-off); LRTW, 52ff.

Table 3.3. Socialist Votes in Reichstag Elections, Saxony and the Reich, 1871 and 1874

	Eligible voters	Total ballots cast	Turnout rate	Socialist				
				Candidates	Votes won	Share of enfranchised voters	Share of ballots cast	Seats won
	(no.)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(no.)	(%)	(%)	(no.)
Saxony								
1871	473,000	213,000	45.1	18	42,000	8.9	19.7	2
1874	524,914	259,592	49.5	22	92,180	17.6	35.4	6
Reich								
1871	7,656,000	3,907,000	51.0	93	124,000	1.6	3.2	2
1874	8,523,446	5,223,864	61.3	162	351,952	4.2	6.8	9

Notes: Figures for 1871 in cols. 2, 3, and 6 have been rounded. In col. 6, Saxony 1874, Schmidt, “Arbeiterbewegung,” cites 88,907 SDAP votes and 5,255 ADAV votes. In col. 6, Reich 1874, Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 466, cites 171,351 SDAP votes and 180,319 ADAV votes.

Sources: SHStAD, Mdl 865a–c, and other statistical sources; Steinbach, “Sozialdemokratie”; Rohe, *Wahlen*; Ritter, “Wahlrecht”; Ritter, “Wahlen”; Schröder, “Wahlrecht”; Schmidt, “Arbeiterbewegung.”

their solidarity with other “state-supporting” parties. Fewer still wanted to live up to the Free Conservatives’ moniker of the “Bismarckian party *sans phrase*.”

Social Democracy’s gains in the 1874 elections sent shock waves throughout Germany, but the repercussions did not register the same way everywhere. Prussian Interior Minister Friedrich zu Eulenburg and Berlin Police President Guido von Madai stressed two features of the campaign: the socialists were trying to defend against election tricks by state officials and they were perpetrating some of their own. These Prussian authorities believed the Social Democrats planned to exert “a terroristic influence on the polling place or the electorate itself.” A “tumultuous, violent disturbance” was foreseen, by means of which Social Democratic leaders (allegedly) hoped to elect between eighteen and twenty deputies to the next Reichstag.<sup>97</sup> Prussian authorities were over-reacting. Only three Social Democrats were elected outside Saxony.

Such forecasts only increased the apparent magnitude of the socialists’ triumph in Saxony, which envoys in Dresden reported as though speaking with one voice.<sup>98</sup> “No one reckoned with such an eventuality [six SPD seats], which casts a highly unfavorable light on the mood in the cities and industrial districts.” In Dresden alone, socialist candidates received over 5,100 votes: “Even though all these voters cannot be deemed real Social Democrats, they are nevertheless people who stand

<sup>97</sup> BAP, RKA 1433.  
<sup>98</sup> For the following, Solms, 16/21/28/29.1.74, 27.2.74, 8.4.74, 3.5.74, 11.6.74, 12.8.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1; Gasser, 18.3.74, 9.4.74, 6/19.6.74, 12.11.74, BHStAM II, MA 2847; Franckenstein, 24/31.1.74, 30.5.74, 31.10.74, HHStAV, PAV/40; Strachey, 17/20/31.1.74, 13/20.3.74, 5/[19].5.74; 14/17.5.74, 21.10.74, 22.10.74, 13.11.74, 19.5.75, PRO, FO 215/34 (drafts) and FO 68/158–9.

Table 3.4. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1871 and 1874

	3 March 1871		10 January 1874			
	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
German Conservatives	5.2	0		18,704	7.2	1
Free Conservatives	2.8	0		36,545	14.2	5
National Liberals	22.4	8		69,782	27.1	7
Liberals, Left Liberals	40.1	13		35,985	14.0	4
Social Democrats	17.5	2		92,180	35.8	6
Total		23	259,592			23
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	14.1	57		359,959	7.0	22
Free Conservatives	8.9	37		375,523	7.2	33
National Liberals	30.1	125		1,542,501	29.7	155
Liberals, Left Liberals	16.5	47		447,538	8.6	49
Social Democrats	3.2	2		351,952	6.8	9
Total		382	5,223,864			397

Notes: The Catholic Center Party, ethnic minority parties, and other small groups have been omitted for the sake of clarity. See the tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>. In 1871, 12 percent of the votes cast in Saxony were for candidates of parties not listed; many "liberal" votes and seats went to Conservatives. In 1874 a Saxon Conservative, Prof. Gustav Richter, officially joined no caucus.

Sources: SHStAD, Mdl 865c, 865e; RWA; Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 115.

under the command and terrorism of the party." Saxon state ministers were "very startled" by the results too: "no one had expected the party to grow so much, especially not in Dresden, because this city is home to relatively few factory workers."

Social Democracy's enemies in Saxony glimpsed a silver lining to the cloud that hung over the kingdom in January 1874. Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz hoped that the "parties of order" would finally open their eyes to the socialist danger and take the initiative to contain the threat. Moreover, Lassalleans and Eisenachers had opposed each other in four Saxon constituencies: maybe disunity would hobble the extreme Left. Lastly, socialists in Saxony suffered a setback when Johann Jacoby, who stood astride the left-liberal/socialist divide, refused to take up the Reichstag seat he won in 13: Leipzig-County.<sup>99</sup> Disappointment turned to dismay for the socialist when a by-election was held on 28 February 1874. Anti-socialists regrouped and elected the Conservative candidate.<sup>100</sup> It appeared the socialists' electoral momentum had been halted. Now—could it be reversed?

<sup>99</sup> Silberner, *Jacoby*, 497–504; Weber, *Unglück*, 301; Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 1:543; BAmL, 465f.

<sup>100</sup> Dr. jur. Karl Heine was one of Leipzig's most influential urban developers and businessmen; he owned the estate of Gundorf and already sat in the LT.



## CONSENSUS?

Government leader Richard von Friesen did not hesitate long in trying to rally the troops. Before the end of January 1874, in a dinner address to members of the Landtag's lower house, he cited the "bad impression the elections in Saxony must make in Berlin." He urged his listeners to recognize "the necessity of cooperation between the government and all order-loving elements in the land." Allegedly Friesen was prompted to make this speech by rumors that influential Conservative estate owners believed Social Democrats were less dangerous than National Liberal centralizers.<sup>101</sup>

Three weeks later the Saxon and Prussian war ministers started corresponding about Social Democratic penetration of the Saxon army. This exchange immediately attracted Bismarck's attention. It reveals that Berlin and Dresden both contributed to escalating the war against subversion. Saxon War Minister Fabrice cited the recent Reichstag elections as proof of "alarmingly rampant" socialist activity in the army. He asked whether the moment had now come "to respond to the party of revolution" (Bismarck's marginalia: "how?"). Fabrice wanted to set limits to socialists' "unhindered machinations among soldiers on leave who, during their time of service, have sworn a special oath of loyalty to king and country but who, in their political activities, act in direct contradiction to it."<sup>102</sup> Fabrice concluded by suggesting that he must leave it to the Reich chancellery to determine whether a corrective to the army's predicament could be found (Bismarck: "if that could help?"). In passing this letter on to Bismarck, the Prussian war minister observed that conditions in the Prussian army were luckily not as bad as in Saxony.

Bismarck agreed.<sup>103</sup> Saxony faced a daunting challenge. But the chancellor "sniffed among the odors of adversity the perfume of opportunity" (as his biographer Otto Pflanze once put it).<sup>104</sup> He proposed that Saxony take the lead in moving to the next stage of repression: it had won such a strong reputation for tolerance during the "liberal era" that it was better placed than Prussia to take charge against this growing threat. Bismarck instructed his own war minister to assure Fabrice that if Saxony moved forward, it could be "certain" of support from Berlin.

The hint was too broad: Fabrice bristled. Prussia had provinces that were just as "infected" as Saxony's, he replied, and it should not try to push its neighbor into the advance guard. He added dutifully that appropriate proposals could nevertheless be forwarded to the chancellor. King Albert submitted four suggestions of his own to Fabrice. According to the Saxon king, the best way to meet the threat was to deny the right to attend political assemblies even to soldiers who had completed their military service. They should be barred from joining political associations. They

<sup>101</sup> Franckenstein, 24.1.74; Solms, 28.1.74; both cited previously.

<sup>102</sup> Fabrice to former Pr. Minister of War Albrecht von Roon (copy), 13.2.74, BAP, RKA, Nr. 1292/2.

<sup>103</sup> Pr. Minister of War Georg von Kameke to Bismarck, 27.2.74, and reply (draft), 3.3.74, BAP, RKA 1292/2.

<sup>104</sup> Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:210.

should remain subject to courts martial. And like active soldiers they should be deprived of the right to vote.<sup>105</sup>

Through 1875 and 1876, Saxon efforts to meet the socialist threat satisfied neither Bismarck nor other state ministers in Berlin. They were still dissatisfied with the Reichstag's refusal in May 1875 to pass anti-socialist amendments to the Criminal Code.<sup>106</sup> Prussia turned up the pressure on other federal states—especially Saxony, though also Braunschweig, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and Hamburg—to match anti-socialist efforts underway in Bavaria and Prussia. Prussian ministers and civil servants also pledged to work harder to gather and disseminate information about Social Democratic and trade union activities in the other states.<sup>107</sup> To Bismarck's dismay, Prussian Interior Minister Eulenburg only urged the other state governments to make better use of the laws already available to them. Further socialist gains in the Reichstag elections of January 1877 showed that this strategy was yielding meager returns. Social Democratic votes in Hamburg rose from 300,000 in 1874—already 41 percent of the popular vote—to 600,000 in 1877. The chancellery's response was to request a Reich association law that would accomplish what the Criminal Code could not.

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Saxony's non-socialist parties also responded to the shock of January 1874 with a sense of urgency; but their unanimity was fragile and short-lived. The National Liberals' *Constitutionelle Zeitung* claimed to speak for all upstanding Dresden burghers in expressing outrage over the military-like discipline and "Jesuit intrigue" that had contributed to socialist victories. It also blamed the election outcome on "the laziness of the citizenry," which it declared unacceptable under conditions of the universal suffrage, and the "unhelpful, petty squabbles among like-minded liberal parties."<sup>108</sup> To meet these challenges Dresden liberals founded a German Reich Association in February 1874. It was intended to help overcome the apathy of Dresden burghers who had "dishonored" themselves by failing to cast ballots in the previous election.<sup>109</sup> This initiative was also pursued in Leipzig as the Association of Reich Loyalists. The Dresden branch reflected the liabilities of the traditional politics of notables. Of 110 members, fifteen—mainly city counselors, lawyers, and teachers—were drafted onto an executive committee. A festive dinner on the Brühlische Terrasse celebrated the Kaiser's birthday on 22 March 1874. This event was repeated in 1875 and 1876. In subsequent years it proved more congenial to hold the dinner in the rooms of the Harmony Society, sponsored by Dresden's

<sup>105</sup> Kameke to Fabrice (4.3.74), reply (7.3.74), King Albert to Fabrice, n.d. [Feb.–Mar. 1874], and Fabrice to Saxon GM (7.3.74), in Schmidt, "Organisationsformen," 359, and Mehner, "Militärkaste," 227f.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Naujoks, *Entstehung*, ch. 4; Keyserlingk, *Manipulation*, chs. 3–4; Pöls, *Sozialistenfrage*, 34–40.

<sup>107</sup> See e.g. "Zusammenstellung . . ." (21.8.78), SHStAD, Mdl 10977.

<sup>108</sup> CZ, 13/17.1.74.

<sup>109</sup> Circular, 20.2.74, and statutes, StadtAD, Kaps. 136; CZ, 4.3.74; Solms, 27.2.74, 8.4.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1; Strachey, 20.3.74, 25.4.74, 5.5.74, PRO, FO 68/158.

assembly and council. Soon these gentlemen held meetings only during “the season” (October to May). Otherwise they busied themselves sending congratulatory telegrams to Bismarck or the Kaiser whenever the opportunity arose—with ever more idolatry for the Iron Chancellor, sniffed cynical envoys and disaffected Conservatives.<sup>110</sup>

Karl Biedermann claimed that Saxon National Liberals founded the German Reich Association as a “laudable act of self-abnegation.”<sup>111</sup> Once it was established state-wide, Biedermann served as its chairman. He was succeeded in 1876 by Eduard Stephani. The rudimentary Saxon National Liberal Party voluntarily merged into the new association. Despite the association’s goal of uniting all non-socialist parties to avoid competing candidacies when faced with Social Democratic opponents in Reichstag elections, most Conservatives and Progressives remained aloof. Progressives preferred to establish their own German Progressive Association in Dresden,<sup>112</sup> and Conservatives found it difficult to join an association that aimed “to motivate and educate” people “in a *liberal* and *pro-Reich* sense.”<sup>113</sup>

Friesen, Nostitz-Wallwitz, and the Saxon civil service were no more friendly toward the German Reich Association than they were toward the National Liberal Party.<sup>114</sup> Both organizations were suspected of pro-Prussian, centralizing ambitions, and on each count they were guilty as charged. Biedermann’s newspaper and the *Constitutionelle Zeitung* were likely supported from Bismarck’s clandestine Guelph Fund, with which the chancellor bribed journalists. Hans Blum’s articles in the *Grenzboten* often combined polemics against Social Democracy and against Saxon particularism. And Heinrich von Treitschke’s tract on *Socialism and its Patrons* (1874) had nothing good to say about Saxony either.<sup>115</sup> According to one source, the National Liberals regularly described Dresden “as a den of particularists where a reactionary, half-Popish clique encourages the ‘enemies of the Reich,’ spites its ‘friends,’ and stops that constitutional progress which the National Liberals of the kingdom aspire to effect.”<sup>116</sup> Another observer agreed: Saxon Conservatives hated “the *national* element among National Liberals . . . They are ‘traitors.’”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Franckenstein, 3.4.75, HHStAV, PAV/41.

<sup>111</sup> Biedermann, “Conservative,” II; Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:343–54.

<sup>112</sup> For this and some of the following, Gasser, 18.3.74, BHStAM II, MA 2847; Strachey, 20.3.74, 25.4.74, 5/14/17.5.74, 21/22.10.74, 13.11.74, PRO, FO 215/34 (drafts), FO 68/158; Solms, 28.1.74, 27.2.74, 8.4.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1; Franckenstein, 3.4.75, HHStAV, PAV/41; NRZ, 16.5.78, 5.7.78.

<sup>113</sup> SLUB, H. Sax. G. 364, 57–9; *Flugblätter des Deutschen Reichsvereins zu Dresden* (1876–9), SLUB, H. Sax. G. 199, 15; StadtAD, Kaps. 136; Otto Richter, *Geschichte*, 14–16.

<sup>114</sup> Solms, 12.8.74 and 17.10.74, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 1; DAZ, 7/8.5.74.

<sup>115</sup> Blum, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 2:1–42, esp. 27; Blum, “Zeitung”; Blum, *Heiligen*; Treitschke, *Aufsätze*, 4:122–211. See “Heinrich von Treitschke, ‘Socialism and its Patrons’ (1874),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=590](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=590). Cf. Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:280f.

<sup>116</sup> Strachey, 21.10.74, cited previously.

<sup>117</sup> Solms, 28.1.74, cited previously (original emphasis).

Saxon Conservatives offered three of their own “remedies” to the socialist advance of January 1874.<sup>118</sup> The first was the Conservative (State) Association for the Kingdom of Saxony, founded on 20 April 1875. This association attempted to broaden the Conservatives’ electoral appeal and facilitate anti-socialist alliances with other parties. Its executive committee was chaired by the Dresden lawyer and notary Bernhard Strödel and included such better-known Conservatives as Gustav Ackermann and Ludwig von Zehmen. On 24 June this group issued its founding manifesto—a windy document that avowed no interest in “anti-Reich particularism” but promised to oppose “all extreme tendencies in the political, social, and religious realm.” The Conservative “program” was more anti-liberal than anti-socialist.<sup>119</sup> This tendency grew stronger when a new party organ was founded on 1 July 1875. The *Neue Reichszeitung*, edited from Dresden by the Baltic journeyman editor Baron Eduard von Ungern-Sternberg, contributed substantially to the convergence of Saxon Conservatives’ anti-liberal, anti-socialist, and antisemitic ideology. Within two years the Saxon Conservative Association had over 2,000 members. However, this figure is misleading. Saxony’s association law—like those of Prussia and other German states—prevented local clubs from affiliating themselves with umbrella party organizations at the regional and national level. Contemporaries estimated that the total number of Saxons belonging to Conservative clubs was closer to 20,000.

The second initiative originated outside Saxony: the founding of the German Conservative Party (*Deutschkonservative Partei*, or DKP) in July 1876.<sup>120</sup> After several years of liberal dominance in Berlin, debilitating internal wrangles, and alienation from Bismarck, Prussian Conservatives realized they had to unite on a national basis. The founding manifesto of the German Conservative Party was drafted by party leader Otto von Helldorff-Bedra in consultation with Bismarck. Among twenty-eight signatories, three came from Saxony. This manifesto became the party’s program and was not revised until 1892. It, too, was explicitly formulated as a reaction to the Reichstag elections of January 1874. Although the Conservatives were trying here to appear up-to-date—both national and flexible—they could not hide their opposition to universal suffrage, Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, and socialism. Their program opposed “democracy,” “the rule of the majority,” “big capital,” and all those “who undermine respect for authority and the law.”<sup>121</sup>

The third initiative unfolded not in Berlin or Dresden but in the western administrative region of Leipzig.<sup>122</sup> Conservatives had long faced daunting challenges here: from National Liberals in Leipzig and its environs, and from Social Democrats in the Chemnitz-Zwickau region. Many Conservatives—perhaps the

<sup>118</sup> For the following see esp. Schröder, “Genese”; Schröder, “Armee”; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nrn. 273, 620, 1575–7. Statutes and programs, SLUB, H. Sax. C. 1830, 4; *Vaterl.*, 14.12.00.

<sup>119</sup> LZ, 2.7.75, cited in Schröder, “Genese,” 166f.; Solms, 11.9.75, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 2–3; Retallack, “Parteiführer”; BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nrn. 14860, 15536, 15564.

<sup>121</sup> See “German Conservative Party, Founding Manifesto (7 June / 12 July 1876),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=681](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=681). On Saxon reactions to the party’s founding, see “The Appeal of the Conservative Party in One Federal State (1876–77),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=682](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=682).

<sup>122</sup> Correspondence and other materials in SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 620.

majority—were “card-carrying corpses”: they paid no regular dues, they were incapable of forming local election committees, and they were too thin on the ground to organize successful election rallies. In 1877 two men determined to change all this. The first was Dr. Arnold Frege, whose political career in the Reichstag spanned two and a half decades (1878–1903), including three years as its vice-president. During the 1880s he was a Saxon delegate on the German Conservative Party’s Committee of Eleven and, in 1892 he served on the committee charged with revising the Conservative Party program of 1876. The second figure was Baron Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha (Figure 5.4). In 1871 he inherited the prosperous Rötha estate, lying about fifteen kilometers south of Leipzig. Friesen typified Saxon Conservatives who complained in the 1870s that their government capitulated too easily to liberal demands. He confided to his diary in 1876 that Conservatives in Saxony lacked the courage to stand up to the more confident liberals. “How could things be different,” he asked himself, “considering the official support that [the liberals] receive from the government?”<sup>123</sup> But Friesen was untypical in most other ways. A member of the Reichstag from 1887 to 1893, he had sufficient rank to host week-long visits from Saxon royal princes.<sup>124</sup> With Frege as his “adjutant,” he was destined to play a leading role in Saxon Conservative affairs for almost two decades, steering his party in anti-liberal, antisemitic, and anti-governmental directions.

A printed membership list found in Friesen-Rötha’s unpublished papers illuminates the social profile and geographic distribution of Saxons who belonged to the German Conservative Party at this time. It listed a total of 2,132 members. The party was conspicuously weak in eastern Saxony. About one-third (718) of the association’s members lived in the Dresden region. The association had 367 members in the Zwickau region, whereas almost half its total membership resided in the Leipzig region (home to about one-quarter of all Saxons).

From Figure 3.1 we see that Saxon Conservatives did not fit the Prussian Junker archetype. They recruited about 20 percent of their members from farmers and only 5 percent from owners of knight’s estates. With a total of 574 members, the industrial, trade, and commercial sectors comprised 27 percent of the party’s membership—significantly higher than in almost all other regional wings of the German Conservative Party.<sup>125</sup> This snapshot substantiates other evidence about the high degree of interpenetration among commercial, industrial, civil service, and agrarian interests within Saxon Conservatism. It also illustrates why Saxon Conservatives were able to work closely with liberal parties in which the economic bourgeoisie dominated.

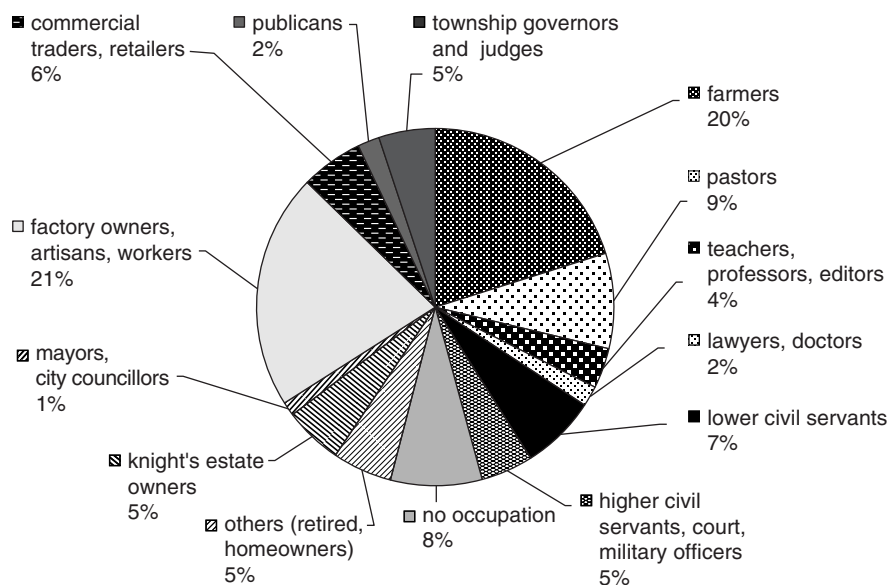
Friesen was distressed by socialist gains in the Reichstag elections of January 1877.<sup>126</sup> He outlined to Bernhard Strödel his plan to organize a new Conservative

<sup>123</sup> SSStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1575 (diary entry of 30.10.76).

<sup>124</sup> Friesen, *Röthaer Kinder-Erinnerungen*, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Combining the two categories of i) *Fabrikanten, Handwerker, Arbeiter* and ii) *Händler, Kaufleute*.

<sup>126</sup> SSStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1575 (diary entry of 25.1.77).



**Figure 3.1.** Saxon Members of the German Conservative Party, c. 1877.

Source: Drawn by the author from “Verzeichniß der Mitglieder der Deutschen conservativen Partei in Sachsen,” SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 620 and from calculations in Schröder, “Genese,” 172–4, and *SParl*, 37.

Association in the administrative districts of Leipzig, Grimma, and Borna. He and Frege soon secured the cooperation of an important patron and colleague: Georg von Welck, district governor of Rochlitz. Welck recognized the hurdles to be overcome. In his own district Welck knew of “*no one* who unites in his person the three qualities required to take in hand the successful founding of a [local] Conservative committee: personal competence, social standing, and enthusiasm for the cause.” He therefore counseled Frege and Friesen-Rötha to plan local associations that included three or four Reichstag constituencies. Only then would it be possible “to strengthen and enliven adherents of conservatism, namely those who completely suffocate—if they are left to their own devices in each constituency—under the thicket of weeds and the throng of opponents.”<sup>127</sup> As an example Welck cited the situation in the Reichstag constituency of 15: Mittweida, where Conservatives were “condemned for eternity to choose either a socialist or a liberal.”<sup>128</sup> Soon Frege and Friesen were hard at work, combing membership lists for about 200 names to which they sent a personal invitation to join the new regional association. On 14 April 1877, Frege opened the founding meeting of the Conservative Association for the Region of Leipzig. His comments attacked the “rapid, wanton development of socialism” as a

<sup>127</sup> Welck to Friesen, 25.2.77 (emphasis added); cf. Welck to Friesen, 23.5.77, 19.7.77, 10.9.77; Frege to Friesen, 4.4.77; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 620 (and the same file for following details).

<sup>128</sup> See also Ungern-Sternberg to Friesen-Rötha, 26.3.77, and Strödel circular, May 1877, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 620.

"poisonous plant in our public life" and the "inevitable fruit of liberalism." Friesen-Rötha was unanimously elected as chairman.

Did these three Conservative initiatives contribute significantly to the transition from a "liberal era" in the 1870s to a conservative one in the 1880s? Some observers in Dresden were favorably impressed by the founding of the German Conservative Party in July 1876, but the influential Conservative leader in the Saxon House of Lords, Ludwig von Zehmen, was not one of them.<sup>129</sup> He judged the Prussians too much "sticklers for principle" and "too little disposed to compromises" to afford materials for "a good working party." The British envoy Strachey agreed with Zehmen that Saxon Conservatives were unlike their Prussian counterparts. In particular they needed members and allies of lesser social rank in Saxony's cities to combat socialism. As he reported to London: "The Saxon Tory may indulge in feudal reminiscences, but he knows the difference between regrets and expectations, while his active political passion is his *particularism*, which is far too bitter to be amenable [to] the compromise with centralization apparently admitted in the [DKP's national] program. Then he is not altogether an 'agrarian' in the new Prussian sense. The word has been used here, but industrial interests preponderate so much that agricultural questions do not come to the fore."<sup>130</sup>

Friesen's and Frege's efforts in the Leipzig region had minimal impact on the Landtag elections of 1877: their organization was lethargic, under-funded, top-heavy, and "chaotic."<sup>131</sup> Slowly, however, they began to mobilize voters in western Saxony, thereby bolstering their own influence in the Conservative state organization and in the national party. As Friesen wrote to the leaders of the Saxon Conservative Association, greater effort would be needed in the years ahead to mobilize new recruits and establish a coherent chain of command if Social Democracy were to be defeated. "The army must be organized before war breaks out; the terrain on which battle will be joined must be reconnoitered, and the strategy must be determined *before* the battle can begin . . . If the Conservative Party wants to fight Social Democracy effectively, it must follow it onto the terrain it already occupies."<sup>132</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SUBVERSION

According to the Conservatives, the liberal laws are to blame for the growth of the proletariat in the industrial centers,<sup>133</sup> for driving the masses away from Christianity, for the Founding Era frauds, for ruining industry and

<sup>129</sup> SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1575; Gasser, 29.7.76, BHStAM II, MA 2848; Solms, 11/17/27.1.77, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Strachey, 13.1.76, 29.7.76, PRO, FO 68/160.

<sup>131</sup> Schröder, "Armee," 159. Cf. Schröder, "Genese," 170f.

<sup>132</sup> Friesen-Rötha, circular of 23.9.77, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 620 (original emphasis).

<sup>133</sup> Bismarck's marginalia here: "not incorrect."

commerce,<sup>134</sup> and for driving the impoverished populace towards socialism. All this is regarded as the doing of the National Liberals, who appear all the more despicable because, in the opinion of the particularists, they are working toward the destruction and nationalization of Saxony.

—Prussian envoy Count Eberhard zu Solms-Sonnenwalde,  
Dresden, to Bismarck, 17 January 1877<sup>135</sup>

*Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbis.*

(Our censor's rule condemns the doves while acquitting the ravens.)

—Juvenal<sup>136</sup>

How do we assess the mutually reinforcing effect of the anti-socialist and anti-Catholic campaigns, a defense of states' rights, electoral mobilization, and the reconfiguration of party relationships? In the mid-1870s Saxony was already known as the cradle of Social Democracy; the Reich's "inner enemies" were Saxony's enemies; and most Saxons knew that a home-grown solution would not suffice to keep the socialist message from spreading. Yet Saxon authorities were unwilling to relinquish their own authority to meet this threat. They resisted "national" imperatives to unleash the *Kulturkampf* or form new party coalitions to eliminate the red threat. Hence, when Bismarck looked to Saxony, the years 1874–77 were filled with frustration.

#### THE *KULTURKAMPF* IN SAXONY

Conventional wisdom has it that Protestant Saxony was undisturbed by Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. The kingdom had few Catholics and the German Center Party played almost no role. This proposition is broadly correct but too simple. First, the Center's absence and Catholics' negligible impact on Saxon elections not only clarified but also widened the gap between socialists and their opponents. The lack of a buffer allowed both sides to define the enemy in the starkest possible terms. Left liberalism's weakness in Saxony had the same effect, although that story, too, is often oversimplified. Second, the *Kulturkampf* provided another bone of contention that divided liberals, conservatives, and the Saxon government. Catholics and socialists were lumped together as *Reichsfeinde*. Yet, Saxon Conservatives and government ministers wanted nothing to do with attacks on the Catholic Church.<sup>137</sup> Conservatives feared that the struggle against Catholicism would evolve into a general attack on religion itself. One of them observed that Social Democratic victories at the polls provided a warning to the chancellor that he was "fundamentally mistaken" in his belief that the *Kulturkampf* would succeed.<sup>138</sup> Conservatives and government ministers also regarded Bismarck's campaign as the

<sup>134</sup> Bismarck: "incorrect." <sup>135</sup> PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 4.

<sup>136</sup> Juvenal, Roman satirist (c. AD 60–c. 130), *Satires* no. 2, l. 24.

<sup>137</sup> *Conservatives Flugblatt für Sachsen*, no. 2 (27.2.76); Strachey, 31.1.75, PRO, FO 68/159; cf. Crowe, 14.2.72, PRO, FO 68/156; Weber, "Phalanx"; Windel, *Catholics*, ch. 8.

<sup>138</sup> Franckenstein, 20.1.77, HHStAV, PAV/42.



thin edge of a wedge that would impose Reich or Prussian laws and regulations onto Saxony. The defense of states' rights led them to denounce Bismarck's efforts or quietly disavow them. The "mobilization against Rome," Richard von Friesen declared at the height of the *Kulturkampf*, "was too hastily undertaken."<sup>139</sup> He and other Saxon ministers regarded Bismarck's anti-Catholic war as unnecessary, intrusive, and divisive.

As a corollary to this—third—the same kinds of persuasion used by Prussia to urge Saxony to comply with its repression of Social Democracy were used to foster compliance with Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. They received the same prickly response in Dresden. What one scholar has written about Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* applies equally well to the Saxons' anti-socialist crusade: Both campaigns were kaleidoscopic, altering their shape with each angle of observation; and both were motivated by "a complex of mutually supporting ideas, prejudices, and circumstances, no one of which would have been adequate to produce the end result."<sup>140</sup>

In 1874–76, Bismarck and Friesen viewed each "enemy of the Reich" from a different vantage point. Knowing Friesen's doubts about the wisdom of the *Kulturkampf*, Bismarck tried to shift the blame for failure onto his colleagues in the Prussian state ministry during a conversation with the Saxon leader in 1874: "I wanted to fight the Center as a political party, nothing more! If they [other Prussian ministers] had limited themselves to that, it would certainly have been successful. I am completely blameless for the fact that they went further and aroused the whole Catholic population." Bismarck claimed he had been too sick to properly digest his colleagues' legislative drafts and delete the "dumb stuff" they contained.<sup>141</sup> Bismarck correctly judged the prejudices of his Saxon interlocutor when he also complained that his reliance on the National Liberals in the Reich ran contrary to his own political inclinations.<sup>142</sup> Friesen took such complaints with a grain of salt. During the two years preceding his resignation from office on 1 November 1876, he grew less sympathetic toward the chancellor's miscalculated attempt to repress the Catholic Church.

Richard von Friesen also believed that Bismarck's centralizing tendencies threatened Saxon sovereignty fundamentally. This outlook was shared by Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz, War Minister Fabrice, Justice Minister Abeken, and Culture Minister Gerber.<sup>143</sup> When they returned "with long faces" from Berlin, they expressed the fear that "Reich politics are leading ultimately to the International." According to Friesen, Bismarck believed he was now "sole minister for Germany and has nothing to do with the cabinets of particular states like Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria and so forth."<sup>144</sup> But the Saxon ministry of state was not united in

<sup>139</sup> Strachey, 5.5.74, 31.1.75, PRO, FO 68/158/159.

<sup>140</sup> Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:179, 196; cf. Fink, "Region," pts. III and IV.

<sup>141</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 3:281ff. (19.4.74); BWiA, 5:467–71.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. BGuE, 376–90. <sup>143</sup> Gasser, 18.3.74, cited previously.

<sup>144</sup> Gasser, 28.12.75, 1.3.76, 14.6.76, BHStAM II, MA 2847–8; Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, Bd. 3; cf. Windell, "Empire"; Philippi, "Verstimmungen"; Strachey, 5.5.76, 8.3.77, 6.4.77, PRO, FO 68/161; Franckenstein, 11.11.76, 17.2.77, HHStAV, PAV/41–42; Bismarck to Friesen, 1.11.76, BWiA, 5:749–51.

its distrust of Berlin. Culture Minister Gerber felt that “there is no other means of combating the Social Democratic movement than to ban it by means of Reich legislation.” Gerber’s proposed text for a new Reich law was certainly succinct: “Article 1: Social Democracy is illegal. Article 2: Anyone belonging to this faction will be imprisoned.”<sup>145</sup>

We might imagine that Saxon statesmen, having avoided the agonies of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, should have known better than to support passage of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1878. But the counter-argument also makes sense: because the *Kulturkampf* had hardly touched their state, Saxon authorities had not experienced the deficiencies of will, manpower, and tactics that showed the limits of the authoritarian state in the battle against “subversion.”<sup>146</sup> A third explanation is that Saxon ministers had less room to maneuver than other state governments. Having industrialized early and thoroughly, Saxony provided more fertile ground for Social Democracy than other parts of the Reich. Because Saxon authorities were obliged to accept the consequences of universal manhood suffrage and social democratization, they took no comfort in having avoided the confessional conflict that had such a corrosive effect elsewhere.

#### BREAKTHROUGH

During the campaign leading to the Reichstag elections of 10 January 1877, the German Reich Association in Dresden and the new Conservative organizations did their best to focus Saxon voters’ attention on the continuing rise of Social Democracy. Mutual recriminations ate away at anti-socialist solidarity. Conservatives continued to direct their animosity toward the National Liberals and Progressives. Even the Conservative Association for Saxony was said to be divided into two camps: a “hyper-Orthodox” wing and a moderate one.<sup>147</sup> The same was true of the German Conservative Party at the national level, which was described as an uneasy union of “the *Kreuzzeitung* Party, the agrarians, the Saxon Conservative Party, and the southern German and Hanoverian Conservatives.”<sup>148</sup> Toward the national party Bismarck adopted a wait-and-see attitude. His hands-off approach left Conservatives and National Liberals to spar for Reichstag seats in 1877.<sup>149</sup>

The Saxon government could afford no such luxury; yet its antipathy toward Saxon National Liberals persisted.<sup>150</sup> Even the British envoy sometimes sympathized with Saxon particularists. Leipzig’s National Liberals, Strachey reported, “would like to see the kingdom turned into a Prussian Pashalik.”<sup>151</sup> By the time the general election campaign was fully underway in the winter of 1876/77, Friesen had departed the scene. War Minister Fabrice became titular head of the

<sup>145</sup> Solms, 23.8.77, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 5.

<sup>146</sup> See Ross, “Kulturkampf”; idem, *Failure*.

<sup>147</sup> Solms, 11.9.75, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 2; cf. Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 118.

<sup>148</sup> Saxon envoy to Prussia, Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Berlin), to his brother, MdI and MdAA Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Dresden), 29.7.76, SHStAD, MdAA 3291.

<sup>149</sup> BWiA, 5:708f. (18.7.76). <sup>150</sup> Strachey, 13.1.76, PRO, FO 68/160.

<sup>151</sup> Strachey, 19.5.75 (draft), PRO, FO 215/34; cf. Solms, 11.9.75, cited previously.

Saxon state ministry. But its leading figure was Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz, who also happened to be the Conservative incumbent for the Reichstag constituency of 3: Bautzen. Nostitz described the Saxon National Liberal Party as “unpatriotic, insulting to the Saxon colours, Byzantine, and anti-national,”<sup>152</sup> and most of his fellow ministers agreed. Therefore the Saxon government could not unreservedly endorse an anti-socialist alliance that included the National Liberals.

In his election primer Bebel focused on issues likely to divide Saxony’s “parties of order.”<sup>153</sup> He attacked the “war in sight” crisis of 1875. He decried *Kulturkampf* repression. And he launched a broadside against repressive aspects of the Reich Press Law of 1874, in the process describing Biedermann as “one of the most comical apple-polishers and phrase-mongers” among German liberals. Bebel paid special attention to Bismarck’s failed effort to sharpen the Reich Criminal Code, citing his declaration in the Reichstag that revisions were needed to silence those who “defended the murderers and incendiaries of the Paris Commune.”<sup>154</sup> Bebel also warned that National Liberals wanted to revise the Reichstag suffrage.

In 1877 Social Democrats were eager to build on their election breakthrough of January 1874. Between May 1875 and August 1876, the Social Democratic Workers’ Party grew by more than 55 percent, from 24,445 to 38,254 members. Party finances were healthy, providing secure employment to more editors, speakers, and agitators. To the party’s twenty-three newspapers in 1876, eighteen new ones were added within a year, including *Der Wähler* (*The Voter*). A new journal, *Die Neue Welt*, addressed theoretical problems, and the party’s central organ (*Vorwärts*) thrived. The socialists’ Reichstag campaign was nevertheless even more focused on “winnable” constituencies this time. The party identified forty constituencies worthy of special effort, and it contested all but one of Saxony’s constituencies.<sup>155</sup> On his agitational tours Bebel spent the bulk of his time in 17: Glauchau-Meerane and 5: Dresden-Old City.<sup>156</sup> If Bebel won both ridings, he planned to accept the Dresden seat and allow a party comrade to contest (and probably win) a by-election in his “traditional” constituency. Bebel also introduced an election theme—the plight of women—that he soon took up in his most famous and influential book: *Woman under Socialism* (1879).<sup>157</sup>

Bebel predicted that liberals and conservatives would work closely with the state to defeat the common foe, “forgetting all their domestic spats.”<sup>158</sup> He was wrong. In the national Reichstag campaign, left liberals and National Liberals fought each other more aggressively than at any time since 1867, and both suffered for it.

<sup>152</sup> Strachey to British FO, 14.5.75, PRO, FO 68/158.

<sup>153</sup> Bebel, *Tätigkeit* . . . 1874–76, 53, 143, 137–40, 160–77; cf. BAml, 475f.; Franckenstein, 20.1.77, HHStAV, PAV/42.

<sup>154</sup> *SBD*, 2:1331 (9.2.76); BARuS, 2:90–100; BWiA, 5:643–59.

<sup>155</sup> BAml, 559f.; Lidtke, *Party*, 54f.; Steinbach, “Entwicklung,” 10. Again 2: Löbau was not contested.

<sup>156</sup> BAml, 564–7; BARuS, 2:682f.

<sup>157</sup> See excerpt from “August Bebel, *Women under Socialism* (1879),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 2: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1763](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1763).

<sup>158</sup> Bebel, *Tätigkeit* . . . 1874–76, 177f.

(See Table 3.5). Nationally the two Conservative parties increased their Reichstag representation to seventy-eight seats after January 1877.<sup>159</sup> In Saxony the conservative renaissance was less dramatic: Conservative seats rose to only seven, won with about 24 percent of the popular vote. Social Democracy's fortunes were rising faster. The party increased its share of the vote to over 9 percent nationally and almost 38 percent in Saxony. In 1874, six of nine socialist deputies in the Reichstag had represented Saxon constituencies; now seven of twelve did.<sup>160</sup>

According to the *National-Zeitung* in Berlin, the 1877 Reichstag election sent "an electric shock through the entire nervous system of our bourgeois existence."<sup>161</sup> The result in Saxony did not produce the same excitement. But anti-socialists were forced to face uncomfortable truths: almost two of every five Saxon voters had cast their ballot for the declared enemies of the state; years of repression had failed to stem the red tide, let alone reverse it; and airy declarations of anti-socialist solidarity all too often evaporated in the heat of battle. Attention in 1877 fell on those contests where lack of unity among Conservatives, National Liberals, and Progressives was flagrant. Recriminations came quickly, explanations less so. Saxon burghers were unsure whether watchfulness was most needed close to home or on a national scale. Either way, Saxony had done nothing to dispel its reputation as the "nest" of Germany's revolutionary movement. One in every four ballots cast for a German socialist was cast in Saxony, and Saxon deputies still made up more than half of the SPD's Reichstag caucus. Nostitz-Wallwitz ascribed the fiasco to the National Liberals. He refused to acknowledge that economic grievances among workers had played a role. He also blamed Germany's "unlimited rights of association" and the Reichstag suffrage: the latter had been "conceived in the smoke of victory."<sup>162</sup>

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Immediately after the elections, Germany's federal princes began to speculate about what could be done to meet the threat of Social Democracy's "colossal" increase. Grand Duke Peter of Oldenburg felt German burghers must be warned that the socialists would soon have a large enough Reichstag caucus to propose independent motions. Even the relatively liberal Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden believed that direct elections with universal manhood suffrage were now endorsed by "only the enemies of true liberty, only the enemies of a healthy political order."<sup>163</sup>

Before the end of January 1877, ideas for revising universal manhood suffrage started circulating in Berlin. These included extending the Reichstag's legislative term from three to five years, increasing the residency requirement for voters, raising the minimum age for candidates from twenty-five to thirty, and abolishing

<sup>159</sup> See SStAL, RG Röttha, Nr. 1575, No. 11, for Cons. campaign activities (11.76–01.77).

<sup>160</sup> See the map for the RT elections of 1877 in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>161</sup> NZ, 21.1.77, cited in Seeber/Hohberg, "Nationalliberale Partei," 413f.

<sup>162</sup> Solms, 27.1.77; Franckenstein, 20.1.77; both cited previously.

<sup>163</sup> Grand Duke Peter of Oldenburg to Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden, 14.1.77; Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden to Prussian King Wilhelm I, 15.1.77; Fuchs, *Großherzog Friedrich I.*, 1:241f. Cf. Müller, "Wahlrecht," sec. VI.2.b.

**Table 3.5.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1874 and 1877

	10 January 1874				10 January 1877			
	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>								
German Conservatives		18,704	7.2	1		56,677	17.3	6
Free Conservatives		36,545	14.2	5		21,785	6.6	1
National Liberals		69,782	27.1	7		74,427	22.7	7
Progressives		35,985	14.0	4		46,395	14.1	2
Social Democrats		92,180	35.8	6		123,978	37.8	7
Total	259,592			23	328,088			23
<b>Reich</b>								
German Conservatives		359,959	7.0	22		526,039	9.8	40
Free Conservatives		375,523	7.2	33		426,637	7.9	38
National Liberals		1,542,501	29.7	155		1,469,527	27.2	128
Liberals		—	—	—		134,811	2.5	13
Progressives		447,538	8.6	49		417,824	7.7	35
Social Democrats		351,952	6.8	9		493,288	9.1	12
Total	5,223,864			397	5,401,021			397

*Notes:* The Catholic Center Party, ethnic minority parties, and other small groups have been omitted for the sake of clarity. See the tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>. In 1874 a Saxon German Conservative, Prof. Gustav Richter, officially joined no caucus.

*Sources:* SHStAD, Mdl 865c, 865e; Schröder, "Wahlrecht," 115, 121.

the secret ballot.<sup>164</sup> Reichstag deputies who sympathized with these assaults on the Reichstag suffrage had apparently let it be known that they would come out publicly in favor of such changes only if the initiative came from the government. Nostitz hedged his bets too. On principle he was no friend of the current voting law, but he was also predisposed to favor the status quo. For example: Nostitz was not confident that raising the threshold for the passive suffrage to thirty would produce better elections; it might be a public relations disaster. If the required period of residency were lengthened, it would be difficult to agree on a new limit. Such a reform might also exclude precisely those voters the government wanted to turn out at the polls, such as civil servants who were transferred frequently from one post to another. Although Nostitz placed "no particular value" on trying to defend the secret ballot, he could not say whether the "conservative development of public life" would be better served by public voting. Nevertheless, sending Germans to the polls less often had obvious benefits: "for a longer period of time," he wrote, "the population would be spared the disruption and excitement that accompany election contests."

Bebel was among the first to recognize the symbolic importance of his victory in Dresden-Old City. He expressed amazement that just nineteen years after setting off as an apprentice wood-turner to earn a living outside Saxony, he was now about to represent Dresden in the Reichstag. Friedrich Engels relished the fact that socialists now represented the home constituencies of the German Kaiser, the Saxon king, and Germany's "smallest princeling" (the Prince of Reuß). These victories had "a tremendous moral effect—on the socialist party, which is happy to see evidence of its advancement, but also . . . on our enemies."<sup>165</sup> Diplomats stationed in Dresden agreed with this assessment. According to one of them, the Social Democrats had won a "moral victory." Another wrote that the real import of the result in Dresden was that that "a victory in the capital city of a land that is already so undermined by socialism may give the party of revolution an unimagined intensity and expansion." Another noted National Liberal outrage over Conservative and Progressive perfidy in Dresden, while a fourth concluded that Dresden Protestants had lost their religious and moral compass: "Experience shows that the lower-middle-class burgher is conservative—if he is religious; but if he loses his faith, then under certain circumstances he immediately becomes a socialist, because his lack of political maturity does not allow him to affiliate himself with the parties lying in between. This has once again been demonstrated in Saxony."<sup>166</sup>

If Bebel's victory in Dresden-Old City casts a harsh light on attempts to foster anti-socialist solidarity, what do other constituency races reveal? The future leader of the Pan-German League, Ernst Hasse, provided one answer. Hasse had recently been appointed director of Leipzig's Statistical Office—a post he held until 1908.

<sup>164</sup> Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Berlin) to Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Dresden), 27.1.77, SHStAD, MdAA 1405; for the following, draft reply 7.2.77, *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> BAmL, 566f.; Engels (n.d.) in Schröder, "Grunde," 10f. Cf. Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Marx und Engels*, 208f.

<sup>166</sup> Gasser, 31.1.77, 5.7.77; BHStAM II, MA 2849. See other envoys' reports cited previously.

Shortly after the January 1877 election Hasse commissioned a detailed, large-scale map that depicted Germany's 397 Reichstag constituencies and the party affiliation of each winner. To this map he appended his own "explanatory remarks." Both were published in the popular journal *Daheim*. Hasse warned all non-socialist parties that disunity in the face of the socialist threat was nothing less than "suicidal." But he was worried by rumors about abolishing universal suffrage. Hasse emphasized that alternative voting systems would have produced even greater gains for Social Democracy in 1877 and would potentially allow them to win an absolute majority in a future election. His message was simple: Hands off the universal suffrage! All hands on deck!<sup>167</sup>

By using a set of criteria first proposed when research for this book was getting underway,<sup>168</sup> we can say when lack of anti-socialist solidarity had a significant impact on election outcomes and when it did not. In January 1877, anti-socialist solidarity broke down in over one-third of all Saxon constituencies—eight of them.<sup>169</sup> Only one of these eight contests ultimately yielded a socialist victory. Why, then, were anti-socialists in Saxony downcast after these elections? First, socialists won five Saxon seats on the first ballot without having to contest a run-off election at all.<sup>170</sup> The party got its most well-known leaders and experienced parliamentarians into the Reichstag, and it now held a bloc of five neighboring constituencies in the Saxon southwest. Second, victories for the non-socialist parties were fairly evenly distributed, preventing any one of them from claiming that it had led the charge against the "reds." Third, contemporaries tended to focus on constituencies where lack of anti-socialist solidarity probably allowed a socialist victory on the first ballot. Such contests produced hand-wringing and further recriminations among the "parties of order."

Some members of these parties grew more discouraged that the effects of German society's fundamental politicization could never be overcome. Although turnout rates for Saxon Landtag elections rose from about 24 percent to 36 percent between 1871 and 1875, we find much higher participation rates for Reichstag elections. Saxon turnout in those national elections rose from 45 percent in 1871 to almost 58 percent in 1877. The turnout rate for run-off ballots was increasing even faster. In 1877 it averaged 68 percent—more than ten percentage points higher than on the main ballot. The total number of ballots cast in Reichstag elections grew by leaps and bounds. Compared to the 161,831 Reichstag ballots cast in

<sup>167</sup> Ernst Hasse, "Unsere Wahlkarte" (with map by R. Andree), *Daheim* [13], no. 20, Extra-Beilage (1877): 320a–b. Reproduced in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. I am grateful to Dr. Erwin Fink for providing me with a scan of this map.

<sup>168</sup> Outlined in Retallack, "What is to be Done?"

<sup>169</sup> 1: Zittau, 5: Dresden-Old City, 9: Freiberg, 10: Döbeln, 14: Borna, 20: Marienberg, 21: Annaberg, and 23: Plauen. Readers can test the following conclusions against voting results found in the table showing Reichstag Constituency Contests in Saxony, 10 January 1877: Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>170</sup> SPD victories in 16: Chemnitz (Johannes Most), 17: Glauchau-Meerane (August Bebel, then Wilhelm Bracke), 18: Zwickau (Julius Motteler), 19: Stollberg (Wilhelm Liebknecht), and 22: Auerbach (Ignaz Auer).

Saxony in August 1867, the 325,912 ballots cast in 1877 was astounding. In only ten years, the number of Saxons who trooped to the polls had more than doubled.

Did anti-socialists fear the SPD's ability to mobilize grass-roots support or did they try to mimic their success? They did both. The more important point is that socialists were the main agents of change. Their action did not produce an equal and opposite reaction. Social Democracy's enemies reacted reluctantly, unsystematically, often ineffectually, to trends they could not reverse. But some of them were emboldened to test new strategies to slow social democratization and prevent political democratization. The "liabilities" of universal suffrage took on special importance as those strategies began to take shape.

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When we cast our own gaze back over the decade, we see that by 1877 Germans had developed the habit of citing constituency contests and voting returns as reliable indicators of the size, strength, and future prospects of the Social Democratic movement. The same kinds of data were used just as frequently to assess the breadth, durability, and anticipated results of anti-socialist solidarity among Saxony's other parties, and the numbers didn't lie. *All* envoys stationed in Dresden, and many Saxon state ministers too, shared two apparently contradictory opinions. First, Social Democrats had earned their victories. They did so through superior organization, discipline, and dedication, each of which was remarkable considering the persecution they suffered. But second, Conservative particularists and National Liberal "centralizers" were guilty of causing their own defeats because they could not unite against the common foe.

The first opinion was voiced by the British envoy George Strachey when he observed that the socialists' gains from 1874 to 1877 were due to a combination of "improved electoral energy, the German system of persecution, a fortuitous accession of strength from discontented particularist and disenchanted official ambition, and a certain positive spread of Social Democratic opinion."<sup>171</sup> By incarcerating the party's leaders and editors, "the German governments [were] educating a far more efficient race of agitators than would otherwise arise." Bebel's reputation as a "popular tribune" was growing so fast that his authority in the party was now "scarcely disputed." Even those who hated him admired "his eloquence, his air of conviction, and the art with which he fascinates a public assemblage."<sup>172</sup>

On the second count, Bismarck expressed both amazement and outrage that Saxon Conservatives should consider supporting a Social Democrat at the polls. Railing against the "blind, fanatic particularism" of the sort demonstrated at election time by Conservatives, Bismarck instructed his envoy in Dresden, Count von Solms, to warn the propertied classes in Germany that they could expect protection only from the Kaiser and Reich authorities, not from the governments of smaller states like Saxony. However, Solms better understood the depths of

<sup>171</sup> Strachey, 15.6.77, PRO, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/161.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Lidtke, *Party*, 52–69; Welskopp, *Banner*, esp. pt. II, ch. 7.



Conservative-National Liberal animosity and its effect on Conservative electoral behavior in Saxony. Writing just before Bebel won the 1877 run-off election in Dresden—allegedly with Conservative help—Solms observed:

Many of these [Conservative] gentlemen . . . seem to assume that a few more Social Democrats in the Reichstag will not pose much of a threat, that a strengthening of this party means damaging the National Liberals, and that, above all else, every lever must be used to topple the latter party.

Others [even] argue that the faster the Socialist Party grows, and the more unexpectedly the government is confronted with the danger the Socialists pose to the state, the prospect that the government will adopt a conservative policy becomes all the more certain.

As a last resort the government will shoot down the Social Democrats with grapeshot, but it would not dare to attack the National Liberals.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Solms, 17.1.77; Bismarck to Solms (draft), 23.1.77; PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 4.

## 4

# The Struggle Against Revolution

Did the enemies of Social Democracy successfully wield the instruments of repression that the Anti-Socialist Law put into their hands? The advocates of *Ordnung und Obrigkeit*<sup>1</sup> were prone to self-satisfaction and over-confidence, but often they doubted whether they could win the war on subversion. They knew they had to follow Prussia's lead, but often they tried to reconcile a campaign against socialism with a defense of states' rights, appeals to common sense, and humanitarian scruples. They attacked Social Democracy on many fronts, but often they reverted to simple vote tallies to decide winners and losers, friends and enemies of the Reich.

Bismarck declared total war on Social Democracy because, he claimed, it strove to overthrow the existing order of state and society. In Saxony this war was not total. Even when the rule of law was severely compromised, as it was between 1878 and 1890, the war on socialism remained a rearguard action. It was best waged, as it had been for years, through servile administrators and pliant judges willing to hound out trouble-makers and hand down prison sentences. It required limited action on an ad hoc basis. Certainly it could be more efficiently organized. But it did not always square with the plans of an unpredictable chancellor or a timorous Reichstag.

In this chapter our perspective moves between the national, regional, and local levels. This makes it possible to convey the range of options open to those who sought to eradicate the threat of Social Democracy. Only when anti-socialist initiatives at all three tiers of politics are surveyed together can we gauge the breadth and intensity of repression.

## THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

We have no choice but to make use of the weak paragraphs of the [Reich Criminal Code] until the musket fires and the saber lashes out.

—Prussian Minister of the Interior Friedrich zu Eulenburg, 1876<sup>2</sup>

*Poprium humani ingenii est odisse quem laeseris.*

(It is part of human nature to hate the man you have hurt.)

—Tacitus<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Order and authority.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Lucius von Ballhausen, *Bismarck-Erinnerungen*, 82f.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola*, chapter 42.

On 26 August 1878, British Consul Joseph Crowe sat down at his writing desk to explain the outcome of Reichstag elections held a month earlier. At five minutes past nine o'clock he stopped writing. He began again nervously: "I was frightened from my desk by a violent vibration of my room and a roar as of thunder. I shook . . . up and down as if I was rolling along upon the trunnions of an 18-pounder. It was an earthquake—which stopped my clocks . . . It made one of my boys sea-sick."<sup>4</sup> In 1878 German political culture also underwent a seismic shift. Previous assumptions about constitutional propriety and political fair play were shaken to their core. In the process many Germans became disoriented. For some, the initial shocks were worst: two assassination attempts on the life of Kaiser Wilhelm I. Others became uneasy when Bismarck dissolved the Reichstag and called a general election. Socialists reeled when an Anti-Socialist Law was introduced into the Reichstag and passed easily. All Germans experienced aftershocks until the law expired at midnight on 30 September 1890. These disturbances tilted the terrain on which election battles were fought, and they opened new fissures.

#### RAMPING UP

Historians have often cited Bismarck's response when he heard that pistol shots had been aimed at the Kaiser on 11 May 1878 by the mentally unstable journeyman plumber Max Hödel. "Now we have them!" exclaimed Bismarck. "The Social Democrats, Your Excellency?" asked an aide. "No," Bismarck replied, "the Liberals." Hödel's shots were so far wide of the mark that the Kaiser continued his carriage ride down Unter den Linden unaware that he had been a target until someone convinced him otherwise.<sup>5</sup> The second would-be assassin was a better shot. On 2 June Dr. Karl Nobiling fired a shotgun blast from an upstairs window facing Unter den Linden. He sank enough pellets into the emperor's neck and shoulder to require a long recuperation. Nobiling botched the job again when he turned the weapon on himself. On 2 June, Bismarck was walking on his estate in Friedrichsruh when he received news that shots had again been fired at the Kaiser. "The prince halted abruptly . . . As though struck by a flash of inspiration, he said 'Then we will dissolve the Reichstag!'"<sup>6</sup> Only later did he ask about his emperor's health.

In the summer and autumn of 1878 not all decisions fell Bismarck's way, but he achieved his principal goals. After the first assassination attempt Bismarck presented to the Federal Council a hastily drawn up bill outlawing the Social Democratic Party. The Reichstag rejected this legislation in the last week of May. The second attempt on Wilhelm's life changed the mood of the nation. This time Bismarck persuaded the federated governments to dissolve the Reichstag and schedule general elections for 30 July. In the ensuing election campaign the government focused the

<sup>4</sup> Crowe (Düsseldorf) to Lord Odo Russell (Berlin), 26.8.78, PRO, FO 918/25. The later Foreign Office senior clerk Eyre Crowe was the youngest of J. A. Crowe's three sons: they were born in 1862–4.

<sup>5</sup> Kampffmeyer/Altmann, *Sozialistengesetz*, 159; Braun, "Kampf."

<sup>6</sup> Christoph von Tiedemann, cited in Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:397.

enmity of the right-wing parties and most non-working-class voters on the Social Democrats, left liberals, and National Liberals, making few distinctions between the purveyors of revolution and those who assisted them. In the Reichstag elections of July 1878 the two Conservative parties and the Catholic Center increased their caucuses by a total of forty-two seats; the National Liberals and Progressives lost a combined thirty-seven seats; and the socialist caucus sank from twelve to nine members (of whom six represented Saxony). On 9 September the Reichstag was sent a proposal for a Law Against the Publicly Dangerous Endeavors of Social Democracy.<sup>7</sup>

After seeing the draft bill, Saxony's military plenipotentiary in Berlin wrote that "my expectations have been *very far* exceeded; in truth it deserves its characterization as draconian."<sup>8</sup> By a roll-call vote of 221:149 the Reichstag approved the Anti-Socialist Law on 19 October. It was renewed at regular intervals until January 1890, when non-renewal allowed it to lapse the following September. During the twelve years the law was in effect, the National Liberals never shook off the odium of having surrendered to Bismarck's demand for an exceptional law. Long-term consequences included the secession of the party's left wing, self-doubt, and decline at the polls. Leipzig's deputy mayor Eduard Stephani referred to the "accursed election war" that Bismarck waged against the National Liberals in 1878.<sup>9</sup>

The Anti-Socialist Law outlawed associations, printed matter, and assemblies that sought "the overthrow of the existing political and social order through Social Democratic, socialist, or communist endeavors . . . in a manner dangerous to the public peace and, particularly, to the harmony among the classes of the population" (§1).<sup>10</sup> Among the law's thirty articles were three provisions on which our story hinges. The first was §28. It stipulated that a Lesser State of Siege<sup>11</sup> could be imposed on particular districts—cities and their immediate environs—when public safety was deemed to be in danger. If the Lesser State of Siege were invoked, Social Democrats could be expelled from the area by local authorities. The second provision (§6) stated that the Anti-Socialist Law would be administered not by a central Reich authority or through the courts, but by police and civil servants in each federal state. In Saxony the law was enforced by mayors and police directors, working in conjunction with district and regional governors who in turn reported to the ministry of the interior in Dresden. The third important feature of the law was a negative one: it contained no provision banning Social Democrats from running for parliament. This meant that from the moment an election campaign officially began until the polls closed it was lawful for Social Democrats, like members of any other party, to form election committees, issue manifestos and

<sup>7</sup> *Gesetz gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie*, known as the Sozialistengesetz.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Edler von der Planitz to Saxon minister of war, 13.8.78 (original emphasis); SHStAD, SKAD, Nr. 4490.

<sup>9</sup> Stephani to Treitschke, 25.9.78, Heyderhoff/Wentzcke, *Liberalismus*, 2:223f.

<sup>10</sup> For the full text see "Anti-Socialist Law (21 October 1878)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1843](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1843).

<sup>11</sup> *Kleiner Belagerungszustand*; expellees were "*Ausgewiesene*."

flyers, and hold election rallies. This negative provision was often flouted in practice. At a very early stage, contemporaries recognized the gray areas where these provisions of the law contradicted one another.<sup>12</sup> Bismarck always tried to deny this complexity, as when he warned Germans “against the nihilistic knife and the Nobiling shotgun.”<sup>13</sup>

Once the law came into effect on 22 October 1878, police and state authorities moved quickly. They shut down Social Democratic printing presses, confiscated party treasuries, banned public rallies, dissolved SPD associations, and outlawed socialist trade unions. By early 1879 authorities in Saxony and most other federal states expressed satisfaction that the party had been hamstrung so quickly and completely. From 1882 to early 1886 the law was applied less rigorously: for those in the business of repression there was considerably less work to do. These years were described as the period of “mild practice.” The printed speeches of Social Democratic leaders still reached the hands of their followers. Some social and cultural associations were permitted. And Socialist trade unions began to re-emerge. However, after 1886 a draconian application of the law again became the norm, partly due to escalating strike activity.<sup>14</sup>

The Lesser State of Siege was imposed on Berlin and its environs on 28 November 1878. This “bombshell” came at a time when Bebel and his colleagues were still “groping in the dark” through the maze of repressive laws.<sup>15</sup> Soon expellees from Berlin settled in Hamburg or Leipzig. The same provision was imposed on the Free State of Hamburg and the neighboring Prussian city of Altona on 28 October 1880. Many of these expellees moved to Leipzig. Before the end of 1881, 225 Social Democrats had been expelled. When the Lesser State of Siege was imposed on Leipzig (including the surrounding government district) on 28 June 1881, the exodus was faster still.<sup>16</sup> After the period of “mild practice” ended in 1886, §28 was also imposed on Spremberg, Frankfurt am Main, Offenbach, and Stettin. The timing was not coincidental: bans and expulsions hampered the SPD campaign for Reichstag elections in February 1887. One socialist recalled that the German bourgeoisie was spouting “blood and fire.” Another wrote that “it wasn’t an election, it was a witch hunt, it was an ambush, a moral and physical rape.”<sup>17</sup>

German authorities had to report on the effectiveness of the Anti-Socialist Law and the Lesser State of Siege in venues that were uncomfortably public. These included the Reichstag debates before each extension of the Anti-Socialist Law. Overviews were also drawn up annually by Berlin Police Director Guido Madai and his successors. These reports assessed the strength of the Social Democratic and anarchist movements in all regions of Germany and other European countries as well.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *SBDRA*nl 4/I, 1878, A23.

<sup>13</sup> Bismarck, *Reden*, 2:202f.

<sup>14</sup> On the *Reichs-Commission* set up to consider appeals to bans, see the calculation of bans and appeals under the Anti-Socialist Law, 1878–1890, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>15</sup> *BAmL*, 627f.

<sup>16</sup> Bartel/Schröder/Seeber, *Sozialistengesetz*, 89.

<sup>17</sup> *SD*, 4.3.87; Kühn, *Erinnerungen*, 26f.; cf. Strauss/Finsterbusch, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 110.

<sup>18</sup> Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, vol. 1; Pöls, “Staat,” 206–9; for Saxony, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nrn. 12844–12860.

Eventually they sounded like a broken record—except that the refrain ran in two grooves at once. On the one hand, the Anti-Socialist Law was a success: it provided a bulwark against the revolutionary flood. Hence it could not be allowed to lapse. On the other hand, the law was a failure: it did not keep Social Democratic voters away from the polls and it did not check the growth of the party's grass-roots organization. But if the law were repealed, what might follow would be immeasurably worse. Hence it could not be allowed to lapse.<sup>19</sup>

In these reports, Reichstag election results like those shown in Table 4.1 were used as a yardstick to measure the success or failure of the Anti-Socialist Law. Between 1875 and 1890 no one really knew how quickly Social Democratic membership was growing. Moreover, authorities were often inconsistent in reporting on the effectiveness of anti-socialist measures in their own field of operations. If we consider the Berlin police director's report dated 22 November 1889,<sup>20</sup> we find a litany of police failures, socialist successes, and dark foreboding about the Reichstag elections scheduled for February 1890: "[Next] time the party must field at least a million votes and convince the bourgeoisie that it cannot be vanquished." The report concluded that the socialists stood ready, "fully armed in every respect," to increase their vote.

## SAXONY'S CONTRIBUTION

A Sicilian mail cart could not have been plundered by brigands more thoroughly than were the premises of many trade unions in Dresden. Not only the union libraries but the bookshelves themselves were carried off, and if any money was found, it was scooped up too.

—Saxon SPD Landtag deputy Hermann Goldstein<sup>21</sup>

In time we hate that which we often fear.

—William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, act I, scene 3

The Anti-Socialist Law was not Saxony's invention, but it was Saxony's instrument.

It helped the government achieve two objectives. First, the astounding advance of Social Democracy in Reichstag elections was halted. The socialists' share of the popular vote in Saxony had reached 38 percent in 1877; this figure was not matched until 1890. In 1877 Social Democrats represented seven Saxon constituencies; this high-water mark was not reached again until 1893. Second, by focusing attention on the "revolutionary" threat, the Anti-Socialist Law accelerated the decline of liberalism in the kingdom. After 1878 the government and Conservatives

<sup>19</sup> Strachey, 2.2.88, PRO, FO 68/173; KHM Otto zu Münster (Leipzig) to MdI, 17.5.82, SHStAD, MdI 10982.

<sup>20</sup> Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 1:354–7. Cf. Leipzig Police Director Richard Bretschneider to KHMS Leipzig, 21.5.84, 7.5.87, 6.5.89, SHStAD, KHMSL 245.

<sup>21</sup> Goldstein's speech in SPD Sachsens, *Sozialdemokratischer Parteitag Dresden 1903*, 6–11.

**Table 4.1.** Social Democracy in Reichstag Elections: Saxony and the Reich, 1878–90

Year	Eligible electors (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Voter turnout (%)	Socialist candidates (no.)	Socialist votes won (no.)	Socialist share of votes cast (%)	Socialist proportion of eligible electors (%)	Socialist seats won (no.)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Saxony</b>								
1878	585,444	342,687	58.5	22	128,039	37.6	21.9	6
1881	597,517	313,345	52.4	21	87,786	28.2	14.7	4
1884	622,792	364,602	58.5	23	128,142	35.3	20.6	5
1887	656,214	522,025	79.6	23	149,270	28.7	22.7	0
1890	701,230	574,974	82.0	23	241,187	42.1	34.4	6
<b>Reich</b>								
1878	9,124,000	5,781,000	63.4	198	437,000	7.6	4.8	9
1881	9,090,000	5,118,000	56.3	191	312,000	6.1	3.4	12
1884	9,838,000	5,682,000	60.6	172	550,000	9.7	5.6	24
1887	9,770,000	7,570,000	77.5	256	763,000	10.1	7.8	11
1890	10,146,000	7,262,000	71.6	342	1,427,000	19.7	14.1	35

*Notes:* Reich totals are rounded. Col. 2 lists total ballots cast, col. 6 is based on valid votes cast. Col. 3 (Saxony) and col. 7 calculated by the author. See also the tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

*Sources:* “Statistik . . .,” *SBDRA*nI (1878–90); RWA, 39f., 63; Steinbach, “Entwicklung,” 7.

unleashed increasingly sharp attacks on the two wings of Saxon left-liberalism—Progressives and Radicals—and even on left-leaning National Liberals. By the early 1880s the “liberal era” of 1868–76 was a distant memory: Saxon ministers had little inclination and no need to accommodate the Left.

Nevertheless, we discover that the self-proclaimed defenders of state and society held ambivalent views about social democratization and its ramifications. Even socialism’s most determined foes in Saxony conceded that they could not successfully curtail socialist agitation, keep the movement’s leaders in jail, scoop up socialist propaganda, or convince the “parties of order” to set aside their differences. As Saxon liberalism lost its zeal for reform, Social Democrats gradually became the acknowledged advocates of the “little man” in society. They consolidated their hold on the allegiance of the working classes and gained support among the lower middle classes. Moreover, as Saxons joined the national campaign against “the party of revolution” they never entirely persuaded their counterparts in Prussia that they were not parochial, inept, self-serving, or half-hearted. Saxon statesmen were often seen to be dragging their feet. Even when they acted decisively, skeptics in Berlin complained that they could do better or should have acted sooner.

#### RALLYING THE TROOPS

The Reichstag election campaign of July 1878 offered an opportunity to mobilize against the socialists in new ways. Police and administrators in Saxony did their best to rise to the occasion. They banned socialist rallies or ordered their dissolution on the flimsiest of excuses. They threw functionaries and candidates into jail—*lèse majesté* was the preferred charge—and they urged the “parties of order” to avoid competing candidates. Saxon ministers and Bismarck in Berlin made sure party leaders and voters knew which candidates they preferred. Saxon burghers followed suit. Some employers threatened to dismiss not only workers who cast ballots for Social Democratic candidates but any who voted at all.<sup>22</sup> And the National Liberal press hit every note in the anti-socialist register.<sup>23</sup> But the socialist advance was not reversed. Whereas the number of Saxon Social Democrats in the Reichstag was reduced from seven to six, votes cast for socialist candidates in Saxony rose from about 124,000 in 1877 to 128,000 in 1878. Complacency and disunity among the non-socialist parties contributed to this outcome.<sup>24</sup>

The government and the non-socialist parties initially hoped that many Saxon constituencies could be taken back from the socialists. These included 5: Dresden-Old City (represented by Bebel), 13: Leipzig-County (Adolf Demmler), 16: Chemnitz (Johann Most), and 18: Zwickau (Julius Motteler). But as soon as the campaign began, conflict erupted between the Conservatives and National Liberals

<sup>22</sup> SHStAD, MdI 865(f). On the failed German Anti-Socialist Workers’ Congress (13–14.10.78) in Dresden, see Schüller, “Kampf,” 2:16; Strachey, 17.10.78, PRO, FO 68/162; Mößlang/Whatmore, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 1:340f.

<sup>23</sup> Schaal, “Methoden.”

<sup>24</sup> Solms, 7.6.78, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, vol. 1.



in 5: Dresden-Old City. This contest exhibited features found elsewhere in the kingdom: the Conservatives were reluctant to nominate compromise candidates with the National Liberals, and liberals were willing to ally with parties to the left of them (National Liberals with Progressives, Progressives with socialists). Soon the Dresden riding epitomized a worst-case scenario.<sup>25</sup> The National Liberals wanted to nominate the mayor of Dresden, Dr. Paul Stübel. They felt aggrieved when the “high-handed” Conservatives nominated former government leader Richard von Friesen without first consulting them. The Progressives planned to nominate Wilhelm Schaffrath, their long-time leader in Dresden, but then they reversed themselves and nominated August Walter, the incumbent in 10: Döbeln. The Progressives insisted on running Walter because they could not bring themselves to support Friesen, whom they remembered principally as the *Reaktionsminister* from 1849–50.

Bismarck let the National Liberals’ Reich Association in Dresden know that he disapproved of such fractiousness. He felt that a “moderate particularist” (Friesen) was less dangerous than “*Reichsenthusiasten*” who practiced “doctrinaire opposition.” According to one insider, Bismarck did not believe the elections hinged on whether “a few more or a few less Social Democrats” got elected—“he regards Social Democracy as a passing phantom.” Bismarck’s “real enemies” were “the Progressives and men like [the National Liberal Eduard] Lasker who are working towards establishing the republic under the mask of constitutionalism.”<sup>26</sup>

On election day, National Liberal spirits could not have been lower. As one of them wrote, “At the beginning of the election campaign, immediately after the assassination [attempts], everyone rallied against Social Democracy. Today, apparently, [this party] . . . no longer appears so dangerous . . . [The socialists] have been delighted to watch the parties of order tear each other to pieces.”<sup>27</sup> When the vote in 5: Dresden-Old City revealed that Friesen and Bebel would face each other in a run-off ballot, Friesen’s prospects dimmed further. Conservative particularists felt that Friesen was too friendly to Prussia. The timing of the run-off ballot was also unfortunate. Affluent Dresdeners remained in the city until the main ballot was held on 30 July but then many of them departed immediately for their summer homes in the countryside or vacations abroad. Those who left included “the well-off, civil servants, teachers, and parents with schoolchildren.” An “excursion train” took as many as 600 Friesen supporters away to Switzerland just before the run-off ballot. Enough Dresdeners stayed to make the ten-day campaign a bitter one: “the competing parties did not draw back from any kind of defamation and threats.”<sup>28</sup> Voter turnout was high and the mood was tense as a crowd gathered to hear the

<sup>25</sup> Schüller, “Kampf,” 17–36; Kühn, *Erinnerungen*, 84.

<sup>26</sup> Saxon envoy to Pr., Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Berlin), to MdAA Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Dresden), 2.7.78, SHStAD, MdAA 1405. Cf. “Herbert von Bismarck on Election ‘Overseers’ in Danzig and Bismarck’s Strategy against Left Liberalism (October 1881),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=691](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=691).

<sup>27</sup> *DN*, 30.7.78, in Schüller, “Kampf,” 28.

<sup>28</sup> Election flyers in BAP, RKA 1293; acting Austrian envoy Baron Rüdiger von Biegeleben, 27/31.7.78, 17/31.8.78, HHStAV, PAV/42.

run-off result on the evening of 9 August. When Bebel beat Friesen by 11,619 votes to 10,703, recriminations followed quickly. Pro-government newspapers blamed the National Liberals for Friesen's defeat, claiming they had driven Progressives to the side of the socialists. But the same charge was leveled against the Conservatives.

In January 1877 serious disunity was evident among the non-socialist parties in eight of twenty-three Saxon constituencies. Remarkably, the same was true in July 1878.<sup>29</sup> In four of these cases, a Social Democrat won the run-off ballot. The other four ridings were won by two Conservatives (including Arnold Frege in 14: Borna), one National Liberal, and one Progressive. Saxon burghers could not fail to note socialist gains in constituencies where previously they had garnered few votes. One observer captured this mood with a martial metaphor: "The dominant impression is that the enemy was forced back, that he had to yield ground, but that his power, despite everything, was not broken and not shaken."<sup>30</sup> Saxon government leader Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz—who now held both the interior and foreign portfolios in the state ministry—expressed satisfaction with the Anti-Socialist Law, as did Minister of War Alfred von Fabrice and King Albert.<sup>31</sup> The new law also suited Dresden's and Leipzig's police directors. In early 1879 they boasted to Police Director Madai in Berlin that Social Democracy and its trade unions had effectively been shut down in their jurisdictions.<sup>32</sup>

As early as March 1879, however, authorities in Dresden and Berlin began receiving reports that painted a different picture. Party leaders expelled from Berlin had taken up domicile in Dresden and Leipzig. "It is true that Social Democracy presently remains silent," wrote Dresden's regional governor Kurt von Einsiedel, "but it survives underground with undiminished strength . . . In the next Reichstag elections [Social Democrats] will reassert their influence everywhere, as experience shows. What might have been achieved ten years ago can no longer be made up for now."<sup>33</sup> In the years ahead Einsiedel forwarded to Nostitz countless reports from his district governors regretting that the Anti-Socialist Law had not been passed sooner. They also chided local councils for being unwilling to exercise their police powers with enough rigor to defend authority.<sup>34</sup> A police commissioner in Leipzig included others who failed to meet the socialist challenge: small-town mayors, deskbound civil servants, and policemen too young, inexperienced, or timid to shut down Social Democratic meetings.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Saxony 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 20, 22, 23. I have calculated instances of anti-socialist disunity for 1878–87, based principally upon *SBD R* "Statistik . . .," Anlagen (passim); *ZSSLA* 54, no. 2 (1908): 171–80; Specht/Schwabe, *Reichstagswahlen*, 218–34.

<sup>30</sup> Biegeleben, 31.7.78, HHStAV, PAV/42.

<sup>31</sup> Franckenstein, 26.10.78, 13.9.79, HHStAV, PAV/42; Prussian envoy to Saxony, Count Carl von Dönhoff 4/15.2.79, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Pol.-Dir. Schwauf (Dresden) and Pol.-Dir. Rüder (Leipzig) to Pol.-Dir. Madai (Berlin), 28.1.78, 31.3.79, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12844; also Dönhoff, 18.2.80, 3.3.80, 14.10.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bde. 3–4.

<sup>33</sup> KHM Einsiedel to MdI, 11.3.79 (draft), SHStAD, KHMSD 108.

<sup>34</sup> SHStAD, KHMSD 108–9.

<sup>35</sup> See Hohlfield, "Untersuchung," in SHStAD, MdI 19043, including *Gutachten*.

Reichstag by-elections and Landtag elections revealed a socialist party unbowed by repression and intimidation. By February 1881 Interior Minister Nostitz was convinced that “something must be done”—“remedial as well as repressive”—to detach workers from Social Democratic doctrine. Nostitz believed that Saxons would be receptive to the idea of a workers’ insurance scheme “because it is a practical attempt to do something for the working class.”<sup>36</sup> Yet for Nostitz, even this projected reform was tainted. It had a “socialistic basis.” It was too expensive for employers. Worst of all, it was to be organized by the Reich.

Near the end of his life August Bebel recalled that his most difficult years fell between autumn 1878 and autumn 1881.<sup>37</sup> Bebel felt that “pig-headed” Saxon authorities—from “those at the very top right down to the last gendarme”—reveled in their role as saviors of the state.<sup>38</sup> However, other sources suggest that repression was not particularly rigorous in Saxony until the Lesser State of Siege was imposed on Leipzig in June 1881.<sup>39</sup> Bebel himself provided plenty of anecdotes in which Saxon police appear amiable and amateurish.<sup>40</sup> Yet, we should not equate harshness with success or ineptness with failure. Saxon authorities waged the battle against “revolution” on their own terms.

#### EYES ON LEIPZIG

“A great furor”: that was what Wilhelm Liebknecht caused in Berlin, not just Saxony, when he unexpectedly won the first seat for the SPD in the Saxon Landtag elections of 1877. But then came the two assassination attempts of 1878. After the second one, Berlin Police Director Madai dispatched a spy to Leipzig to investigate the crime.<sup>41</sup> Within days Madai knew that Social Democrats were blameless. Even SPD leaders deemed the assassination attempt “catastrophic.” They planned to lie low, expecting their party press to be banned but hoping to avoid imposition of a State of Siege. They also discussed the possibility of not nominating any candidates for the July Reichstag elections. But repression in Saxon was not total—far from it. Madai was displeased when his spy reported that a senior state prosecutor in Leipzig expected no success whatsoever from “exceptional laws, socialist baiting, etc.” Allegedly the disease was “chronic”: it could “never again be eliminated.” Such pessimism was not welcome in Berlin.

Interior Minister Nostitz was also ambivalent about the wisdom and efficacy of a frontal attack on Social Democracy. Barely a fortnight after the Anti-Socialist Law took effect, he remarked that “if the *Vorwärts* turned over a new leaf, [it] ought not to be suppressed just to spite the editor and [his staff].” However, Nostitz added, “the regional governor in Leipzig will take his own view of such questions, to which

<sup>36</sup> Strachey, 9.2.81, PRO, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165.

<sup>37</sup> Biegeleben, 13.9.79, HHStAV, PAV/42. <sup>38</sup> BAmL, 639.

<sup>39</sup> Auer, *Zehn Jahre*, 2:33; BAmL, 625; Bebel to Marx, 12.12.81, BARuS, 2/II:78f.; Strachey, 2.11.78, PRO, FO 68/162.

<sup>40</sup> Inter alia BAmL, 714.

<sup>41</sup> For many of the following observations, see Thümmeler, *Sozialistengesetz* §28, 74–88; Thieme, “Verhängung,” 78; Staudé, *Sie waren stärker*, 73–82.

the ordinary conceptions of justice and injustice do not apply." Then in mid-March 1881, he noted that Bismarck had lately been full of "combateness and loquacity," apparently because a general Reichstag election was approaching. Nostitz had "great admiration" for Bismarck's "renewed vigor" and his foreign policy. But there his confidence ended: Bismarck's domestic policy was "so full of uncertainty and surprises as to be almost incalculable."<sup>42</sup>

Nostitz's fears were soon realized. There had been warning signs that the Prussians' patience with Saxon laxity was growing thin. Police Director Madai had long had his eye on the "nest" of Social Democratic agitators in Saxony. "Sooner or later," the Lesser State of Siege would have to be considered for Leipzig.<sup>43</sup> Each report from Madai's spies in Saxony brought discouraging news: Socialist agitators who had been expelled from Berlin and Hamburg only swelled the ranks of "outlaws" living in Saxony. They were welcomed by party comrades in Leipzig and provided with ten Marks per week until they found work. Socialist leaders met every Sunday at a pub just outside Leipzig, and those meetings were never disrupted. *Der Sozialdemokrat* was being read in Leipzig watering holes as openly as the Marseillaise was being sung in the tailors' hostel near the Catholic church. Madai corresponded regularly with police and district governors in Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden.<sup>44</sup> But he did not trust them: Social Democrats always seemed to know beforehand when house searches were about to happen.<sup>45</sup>

Madai, Bismarck, and Prussia's new minister of the interior, Robert von Puttkamer, each contributed a piece to the puzzle that finally came together in June 1881 with the imposition of the Lesser State of Siege on Leipzig. Madai's intrigue was daring and multifaceted. One of his spies used Bebel's temporary absence from Leipzig to convince Social Democrats there to accept a conspiratorial organizational plan that the police then "discovered."<sup>46</sup> Madai also solicited more reports from local officials in Leipzig, to which he added his own venomous examples of Saxon incompetence before forwarding them to Puttkamer and Bismarck. "The Leipzig police are very good when it is a matter of hurling insolent complaints about Prussia, but in everything else they look the other way."<sup>47</sup>

For his part, Bismarck sent a long memorandum to his envoy in Dresden, Carl von Dönhoff, instructing him to inform the Saxons that they could expect no sympathy from Berlin. If the Saxon government believed the future looked dark, it had itself to blame.<sup>48</sup> Political parties in Saxony, Bismarck wrote, fell into only two camps, "the progressive and the anti-progressive." Into the first camp he lumped all those inclined towards republicanism: the Progressives, the (ex-National Liberal)

<sup>42</sup> Strachey, 2.11.78; 12.3.81 (drafts), PRO, FO 215/34.

<sup>43</sup> Madai to Pr. Mdl Botho zu Eulenburg, 25.11.79, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12844. For the following, unsigned report to Madai, 28.1.80, *ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12844; Madai's "Uebersicht" (31.12.80), BAP, Rkz 646/6; Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 102.

<sup>45</sup> Unsigned reports, 23/26.4.80, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12844.

<sup>46</sup> BAmL, 757f.; Fricke, *Prätorianer*, 102-4.

<sup>47</sup> See materials in GStAB, GsD, VI A 6.

<sup>48</sup> Bismarck to Dönhoff (draft), 18.3.81; PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 3. Cf. Bismarck to Pr. Mdl Puttkamer (draft), 24.3.81, BAP, Rkz 646/6.

Secessionists, the “Democrats,” and the socialists. Against this progressive camp the Saxon government had “unfortunately made no productive use” of the “weapon” provided by §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law. If the Lesser State of Siege were justified anywhere, it was justified in Saxony, with its “many centers of agitation.” Bismarck agreed with Nostitz that the other parties were hamstrung by mutual recrimination and inner divisions. But also to blame was the old bugbear of particularism—among Conservatives, the Catholic nobility, the Saxon court, its civil service, and Guelphs in Saxony’s XIIth Army Corps.<sup>49</sup> “That the Saxon government could have exerted the influence it enjoys among these groups, if it had wanted to, is beyond doubt.” In other respects, too, the Saxon government could have taken positions “less unfriendly to Prussia,” with positive consequences at the polls. “Before the voting public, enmity towards the Reich always has something dubious about it.” But because antagonism toward Prussia was “inborn” in every Saxon voter, this feeling came to the fore when his government “showed the way.” The only remedy, Bismarck concluded, was for Saxon authorities to take the lead in finding a “common operational basis” for what Dönhoff had begun to label the “*so-called* parties of order.”<sup>50</sup> Otherwise the Saxon government would “suffer the consequences of its own system.” Again elections were considered crucial to the outcome of this contest. Beside a passage in one of his envoy’s reports citing Nostitz’s fear that Bebel would take the Dresden seat in the 1881 Reichstag election, Bismarck wrote, “That is the result of the [Saxon] government’s policy *à deux face*: conservative and anti-Reich.”<sup>51</sup>

Another turn of the screw came barely a fortnight later when Prussian Interior Minister Puttkamer rose in the Reichstag during debate on the Lesser State of Siege in Berlin and Hamburg. Responding to “provocations” from the SPD speaker Ignaz Auer, Puttkamer was anything but subtle in alluding to developments in Saxony that could no longer be tolerated. The Prussian government, he told the house, was in possession of information that the Saxon government “naturally knows nothing about.” Because “the danger”—Puttkamer didn’t say *what* danger—was growing “day by day” in Leipzig, the Prussians felt obliged to “leave it to the wisdom of the royal Saxon government” whether it should not follow Prussia’s and Hamburg’s lead and “propose a similar measure [§28] for Leipzig.” Puttkamer tried to pre-empt an objection that Nostitz was soon to raise in private conversation, namely, that Social Democrats expelled from Leipzig would simply go to neighboring Altenburg<sup>52</sup> or other, smaller communities. “In my eyes,” Puttkamer declared, “that would significantly reduce the danger . . . Only when we have reached the point that the evil has been exterminated in the major transportation hubs [like Leipzig] will we look to the future with greater reassurance.”<sup>53</sup> As Bebel noted in his memoirs, “it was not possible to exceed the effrontery with which the

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Saxon military plenipotentiary to Prussia, Paul Edler von der Planitz (Berlin), to Saxon MdAA, 23.8.78, 3.4.81, SHStAD, SKAD 4490, 4493.

<sup>50</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> Dönhoff, 9.3.81, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 3.

<sup>52</sup> In the Duchy of Saxe-Altenburg, immediately west of Saxony and not far south of Leipzig.

<sup>53</sup> *SBDR*, 1:638 (30.3.81). Cf. Bebel’s reply in the RT, 31.3.81, BARuS, 2/1:122–32.

minister of one government dropped a broad hint to another [minister] of what was expected of him. And in Dresden the hint was understood.”<sup>54</sup>

Nostitz-Wallwitz resented being blindsided this way by the Prussians. Over the next few days he did his best to explain why his government did not feel there was any need to invoke §28 for Leipzig. But he did not back down. In his view the only advantage the Lesser State of Siege offered over the current situation was its expulsion clause. This would be completely ineffective against the socialists’ election propaganda. Offenders could be expelled from Leipzig but not from Saxony: they would continue their agitation unless the Lesser State of Siege were imposed on *every* large city in Saxony. Nostitz was obviously sensitive about the issue, even embarrassed.<sup>55</sup> But to the British envoy George Strachey, he used sarcasm to belittle the haughty Prussians. Nostitz’s resistance to Prussia’s pressure is puzzling, because he was no friend of Social Democracy. In this case, however, Nostitz obviously wanted to defend Saxony’s autonomy. Strachey caught the real tenor of Nostitz’s remarks in his draft report, then moderated Nostitz’s language in the fair copy that went to London. Puttkamer’s statement in the Reichstag, Nostitz told him, had been “as ~~amazing~~ surprising to him as it was to the public.”<sup>56</sup> He continued:

If the Prussian government . . . knew of danger hatching in Leipzig, they were better informed than he [Nostitz] was: Bebel and nine or ten other socialist leaders were settled there, and the old, chronic, evil was not, of course, eradicated, but nothing new and acute ~~had happened~~ was happening. These people must live somewhere, and they were not doing any particular extraordinary harm where they were, so as to justify the discovery that their presence constituted ~~any actual~~ a danger. If it did, the “lesser” state of siege would be a useless remedy. He [Nostitz] should then have the right to order Bebel and his associates to leave Leipzig, whereupon they would go somewhere else. On the whole, said Herr von Nostitz, I think we may leave our socialists alone for the present. But this, he added ~~discourteously~~ sarcastically, is subject to the superior lights which they may have in Berlin.

If we left the story there, Nostitz would appear eager and able to resist the Prussians. Nostitz had to put a good face on a bad business and play for time. To that end, through May and early June 1881, he repeatedly asked the Prussians to send him information documenting the alleged new threat in Leipzig. In the meantime Madai had drafted a comprehensive report for Puttkamer, outlining in great detail the inadequacies of Saxony’s police, especially in Leipzig.<sup>57</sup> Against even this onslaught Nostitz stood his ground, to the considerable dismay of the Prussians. The Saxon government, they felt, was engaging in “maneuvers,” and it was motivated by “*Ängstlichkeit*”—a word whose connotations include anxiety, timidity, and scrupulousness. When pressed, Nostitz admitted that the Saxon government was “very poorly served” by Leipzig police: they lacked sufficient “resourcefulness, energy, and zeal.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> BAmL, 753. <sup>55</sup> Dönhoff, 4.6.81, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Strachey, 9.4.81, PRO, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).

<sup>57</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12845.

<sup>58</sup> Dönhoff to Bismarck, 25.5.81, 8.6.81, cited in Thümmeler, *Sozialistengesetz* §28, 76f.; Thieme, “Verhängung,” 81.

## Verzeichnis

der auf Grund von § 28 Abs. 3 des Reichsgesetzes gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie vom 21. Oktober 1878, in Verbindung mit der Bekanntmachung des kgl. Gesamtministeriums zu Dresden vom 27. Juni d. J., aus der Stadt und dem amtsbezirk-mannschaftlichen Bezirk Leipzig ausgewiesen.

A. Mittels Bestimmung der kgl. Kreishauptmannschaft als Landespolizeibehörde vom 28. Juni 1881 aus ausgewiesen:

Nr.	Nam e.	Stand.	Leb- zeit - zeit.	Alter geb.	Statur.	Haar.	Augen.	Nase.	Mund.	Part.	Gesicht.	Besondere Kennzeichen.	Be- merkungen.
1	Bebel, Ferd. Aug.	Tischler	Leipzig	22 2 30	mittel	dunkelbraun	dunkelgrau	langgroß	vollständig	brauner Kollart	voll blaß	Jähne vorn oben auseinander- stehend	
2	Schickel, gen. Me- mann, Andre. Herm.	Tischler	-	29 12 47	mittel	braun wenig gelblich	hellbraun	stark gekrümt	breit	schwar- z, Kollart.	oval	Jähne oben unvollständig	
3	Seifhardt, Theod. Cito	Katalogist	-	21 6 48	übermittel	schwarz	hellbraun	stark	breit	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich		
4	Leif, Wilhelm Joseph	Buchbinder	-	17 2 33	übermittel	braun	braun	gewöhnlich	verdrückt	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
5	Wieland, Hans	-	-	18 8 34	mittel	dunkelblond	blau	gewöhnlich	gewöhnlich	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
6	Seidlich, Joh. Christ.	-	-	2 11 31	untermittel	schwarz	grün braun	groß	verdrückt	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
7	Seifhardt, Wilhelm	Schiffbau	-	19 4 37	mittel	grau melirt	bläulich	groß	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
8	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	28 11 36	mittel	schwarz	schwarz	gewöhnlich	gewöhnlich	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
9	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	11 10 44	übermittel	hellbraun	hellbläulich	groß	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
10	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	10 3 49	mittel	hellbraun	hellbläulich	groß	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
11	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	29 3 26	mittel	dunkelgrau	dunkelgrau	gekrümt	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
12	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	26 9 49	mittel	blond	hellbraun	stark	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
13	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	31 4 9	übermittel	dunkelblond	braun	stark	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
14	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	17 7 56	mittel	dunkelbraun	dunkelbraun	stark	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
15	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	24 2 47	mittel	dunkelblond	hellbraun	gekrümt	gewöhnlich	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
16	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	29 6 54	übermittel	schwarz	hellbraun	stark	vollständig	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
17	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	8 6 50	mittel	braun	braungrün	lang	stark	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	
18	Seifhardt, Carl Gustav	Schneide- meister	-	9 7 37	untermittel	schwarz	hellbraun	lang	gewöhnlich	schwar- z, Kollart.	länglich	trägt goldene Brille, Jähne unvollständig	

Figure 4.1. List of Social Democrats Expelled from Leipzig under §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law. August Bebel's name appears on the first line.

Source: Kreishauptmannschaft Leipzig, "Verzeichnis aller aus der Stadt und dem Amtsbezirk Leipzig ausgewiesenen Personen, auf die der §28 des Reichsgesetzes gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie zutrifft." Leipzig, 28 June 1881. From the author's collection.

During two hectic weeks in June, the final act was played out. On 23 June 1881, Saxony's state ministry agreed that the Lesser State of Siege must be imposed on the city and administrative district of Leipzig, and the Federal Council did the same two days later.<sup>59</sup> The law was dated 28 June and came into effect the next day. The first thirty-three Social Democrats were exiled from Leipzig before noon on 2 July; forty-two more followed by year's end (see Figure 4.1).<sup>60</sup>

Nostitz's *volte face* astonished even the unflappable British envoy. When discussing the new law with Nostitz in early July 1881, Strachey reported that although "I abstained from reminding him of his language to me three months ago, . . . [he] informed me that there had of late been a great recrudescence of Social Democratic activity in Leipzig." Strachey found Nostitz's assertions "very shadowy." He reminded the Saxon minister that Bebel was still Dresden's representative in the Reichstag and remarked that he would be the first victim of the new law. How was Bebel to live, Strachey asked, "if his turner's trade was shut up at two

<sup>59</sup> Relevant reports and motions in GStAB, GsD, VI A 6.

<sup>60</sup> Dönhoff (copy), 12.7.81, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12847; SHStAD, Mdl 10981-10986.

days' notice?" This time Nostitz treated the matter as trivial: Bebel could easily find a front man to carry on his business.<sup>61</sup>

#### LANDTAG BATTLES

Because the Anti-Socialist Law was Reich legislation, intended (in large measure) to counter the democratizing effect of the Reichstag suffrage, its impact on Landtag elections has not attracted much attention. Bebel and other Saxon Social Democrats knew that the imposition of §28 on Leipzig was carefully timed to silence their party during the two weeks preceding the Saxon Landtag elections of 12 July 1881. Did the law effectively hobble the SPD in either the short or long term?<sup>62</sup> Let us first examine the three Landtag elections of 1877, 1879, and 1881 (see Table 4.2) and then the following three held in 1883, 1885, and 1887 (Table 4.3). (Since only one-third of Landtag seats were contested every two years, taking three partial elections together allows us to consider all eighty Landtag contests.) The first set of elections occurred at a time when anti-socialist sentiment was high. The next three ran more "in a groove" and yielded fewer surprises.<sup>63</sup>

One of the most significant trends spanning these six elections is the marked increase in the total number of votes cast. This increase resulted from a growing number of eligible electors and rising participation rates. In the three elections of 1877–81 almost 350,000 Saxons were eligible to vote and almost 110,000 did so. In the next three elections of 1883–87 almost 400,000 Saxons were enfranchised, and almost 160,000 of them cast a ballot. Between the elections of 1877 and 1887, voter turnout rose from 30 percent to almost 45 percent.<sup>64</sup> By the early 1880s the Conservatives held a majority (45) of seats in the Landtag, which they maintained until the end of the decade. The breakthrough occurred in 1881, when the Conservatives won about 57 percent of the popular vote (compared to 42 percent in 1877). Between 1877 and 1887 the National Liberal caucus shrank dramatically, from seventeen to twelve deputies, and so did the left-liberal Progressive caucus, which fell from twenty-two to thirteen deputies. The size of the Social Democratic contingent went in the opposite direction. After electing their first deputy in 1877, Saxon socialists held four Landtag seats after 1881 and five after 1885 (see Table 4.4).

Voting returns suggest how these changes in caucus strength came about. In the three elections of 1877–81 the National Liberals won 19 percent of the popular vote; they were always weakest in rural constituencies. That weakness became even more evident in the three elections of 1883–87: the National Liberal share of the

<sup>61</sup> Strachey, 2.7.81, PRO, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).

<sup>62</sup> See materials in SStAL, AHMSL 2586–7; SHStAD, KHMSL 245–6; cf. BARuS, 2/I:153–61.

<sup>63</sup> Schröder, "Wahlkampf," 53–6. See the maps showing the winning party in rural and urban constituencies for the three LT elections of 1877, 1879, and 1881, and for those of 1883, 1885, and 1887, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>64</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5337, "Summarische Uebersicht . . . 1875 bis auf 1885."



**Table 4.2.** Saxon Landtag Elections, 1877, 1879, 1881

Constituency type/ (no. contested)	Eligible electors (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Voter turnout (%)	Conservatives		National Liberals		Left Liberals		Social Democrats	
				(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
19 September 1877											
Large city (4)	25,066	8,255	32.9	1,426	17.3	3,524	42.7	1,357	16.4	1,918	23.2
Other urban (7)	22,200	6,934	31.2	3,500	50.5	1,597	23.0	1,136	16.4	565	8.1
Rural (15)	65,647	19,037	29.0	9,460	49.7	3,274	17.2	4,125	21.7	1,595	8.4
Total (26)	112,913	34,226	30.3	14,386	42.0	8,395	24.5	6,618	19.3	4,078	11.9
9 September 1879											
Large city (4)	21,997	7,277	33.1	1,724	23.7	1,930	26.5	1,755	24.1	1,822	25.0
Other urban (8)	25,477	9,282	36.4	2,760	29.7	4,358	47.0	1,364	14.7	716	7.7
Rural (15)	74,400	21,576	29.0	13,317	61.7	1,611	7.5	2,154	10.0	4,175	19.4
Total (27)	121,874	38,135	31.3	17,801	46.7	7,899	20.7	5,273	13.8	6,713	17.6
12 July 1881											
Large city (2)	13,613	4,369	32.1	841	19.2	1,085	24.8	1,583	36.2	828	19.0
Other urban (10)	33,596	10,632	31.6	3,506	33.0	2,129	20.0	4,497	42.3	377	3.5
Rural (15)	67,967	21,845	32.1	16,736	76.6	1,423	6.5	2,217	10.1	1,267	5.8
Total (27)	115,176	36,846	32.0	21,083	57.2	4,637	12.6	8,297	22.5	2,472	6.7
Total 1877–1881 (80)	349,963	109,207	31.2	53,301	48.8	20,931	19.2	20,188	18.5	13,263	12.1

*Notes:* Left Liberals include Progressives and “Liberals.” This table does not show ballots cast for “also rans” (*zersplittert*) or those deemed invalid (*ungültig*). Sources differ on the number of (viable) Social Democratic candidates in each election year; cf. Ritter, “Wahlen,” 45; Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe,” 53.

*Sources:* ZSSL 51, no. 1 (1905): 2f.; SHStAD, Mdl 5333–5. Some figures calculated by the author. Discrepancies arising from inaccurate party ascriptions, by-elections, etc., have been reconciled as far as possible.

**Table 4.3.** Saxon Landtag Elections, 1883, 1885, 1887

Constituency type/ (no. contested)	Eligible electors (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Voter turnout (%)	Conservatives		National Liberals		Left Liberals		Social Democrats	
				(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
11 September 1883											
Large city (4)	28,231	11,367	40.3	1,435	12.6	1,358	11.9	3,593	31.6	4,383	38.6
Other urban (7)	25,243	9,357	37.1	4526	48.4	2,103	22.5	1,528	16.3	1,132	12.1
Rural (15)	68,587	24,213	35.3	16,183	66.8	—	—	6,105	25.2	1,750	7.2
Total (26)	122,061	44,937	36.8	22,144	49.3	3,461	7.7	11,226	25.0	7,265	16.2
15 September 1885											
Large city (4)	27,564	12,096	43.9	2,324	19.2	5,274	43.6	1,329	11.0	3,113	25.7
Other urban (8)	28,988	11,973	41.3	2,220	18.5	6,252	52.2	2,108	17.6	1,249	10.4
Rural (15)	85,388	30,111	35.3	18,759	62.3	—	—	2,922	9.7	8,198	27.2
Total (27)	141,940	54,180	38.2	23,303	43.0	11,526	21.3	6,359	11.7	12,560	23.2
18 October 1887											
Large city (2)	16,220	8,895	54.8	6,019	67.7	—	—	—	—	2,832	31.8
Other urban (10)	41,772	20,781	49.7	6,055	29.1	1,456	7.0	9,366	45.1	3,756	18.1
Rural (15)	76,925	30,374	39.5	22,311	73.5	1,432	4.7	694	2.3	5,740	18.9
Total (27)	134,917	60,050	44.5	34,385	57.3	2,888	4.8	10,060	16.8	12,328	20.5
Total 1883–87 (80)	398,918	159,167	39.9	79,832	50.2	17,875	11.2	27,645	17.4	26,638	16.7

*Notes:* Left Liberals include Progressives and “Liberals.” This table does not show ballots cast for “also rans” (*zersplittert*) or those declared invalid (*ungültig*). Sources differ on the number of (viable) Social Democratic candidates in each election year; cf. Ritter, “Wahlen,” 45; Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe” 53.

*Sources:* ZSSL 51, no. 1 (1905): 2–3; SHStAD, Mdl 5336–8. Some figures calculated by the author. Discrepancies arising from inaccurate party ascriptions, by-elections, etc., have been reconciled as far as possible.

Table 4.4. Saxon Landtag Party Caucuses, 1869–87

Election Year	Conservative	National Liberal	Liberal	Progressive	Social Democratic	Total
1869	37	—	43	—	—	80
1871	35	—	45	—	—	80
1873	36	—	44	—	—	80
1875	35	18	4	23	—	80
1877	38	17	2	22	1	80
1879	38	19	1	19	3	80
1881	45	14	1	16	4	80
1883	47	11	1	17	4	80
1885	47	13	1	14	5	80
1887	47	12	3	13	5	80

Sources: SHStAD, Mdl 5329–36; ZSSL 51, no. 1 (1905): 1–12; *SParl.*

rural vote dropped to under 5 percent in the election of 1887. The left-liberal decline was less steep: from 19 percent of the overall vote to 17 percent between 1877 and 1887. The Social Democrats won 12 percent of the vote in the first set of three elections and almost 17 percent in the second set. Between 1877 and 1881, Social Democratic candidates won more than half their votes (53 percent) in rural constituencies. The party's ability to attract voters outside Saxon cities is counter-intuitive, given the party's image as mainly urban and industrial and working class; but it can be explained by three factors. Saxony's countryside was permeated with small-scale industry; many industrial workers lived just outside the large cities; and the SPD gradually became the party of choice for non-working-class protest voters. In most Landtag constituencies won by Social Democrats, more than 40 percent of the population relied on mining, industry, or construction. In four such constituencies, more than 65 percent of the population relied on these economic sectors. This advantage allowed the party to thrive in Landtag as well as Reichstag elections. The penetration of industry, commerce, and services into constituencies that were still classified as rural allowed Social Democrats to elect their best speakers to Dresden's parliament (see Table 4.5).

From the perspective of 1887, the British envoy Strachey compared votes cast in that year with those cast in those same twenty-seven constituencies in 1881. It was the breadth and magnitude of the SPD's advance that he stressed: although the non-socialist parties had increased their total number of votes by about one-third in these six years, the socialist vote was now "*five times greater*"—a "portentous" rate of increase.<sup>65</sup>

\*

Wilhelm Liebknecht's election in the 36th rural riding (Stollberg) in September 1877 broke a logjam in the Saxon Landtag that remained in place in Prussia until

<sup>65</sup> Strachey, 25.10.87 (original emphasis), PRO, FO 68/171.

**Table 4.5.** Social Democratic Deputies in the Saxon Landtag, 1877–87

Constituency (no. and name)	Deputy name	Proportion of population engaged in				1877	1879	1881	1883	1885	1887
		Agriculture (%)	Industry (%)	Commerce (%)	Personal Service (%)						
Large city											
2 Chemnitz	Georg von Vollmar	0.5	66.5	18.1	2.1	NL	NL	NL	SPD	SPD	SPD
4 Dresden	August Kaden	1.1	37.1	20.1	11.8	Cons	Cons	Cons	Cons	SPD	SPD
Rural											
23. Leipzig I	August Bebel	7.6	42.4	17.8	24.8	Prog	Prog	SPD	SPD	SPD	SPD
24. Leipzig II	Wilhelm Liebknecht	9.5	40.9	13.5	29.3	Prog	SPD	SPD	SPD	NL	NL
30. Chemnitz	Friedrich Geyer	10.4	76.0	5.1	4.4	NL	Cons	Cons	Cons	SPD	SPD
36. Stollberg	i) Liebknecht (annulled)	15.2	68.8	4.2	5.4	(SPD)					
	ii) Otto Freytag (1877)					SPD	SPD	SPD	Cons	Cons	Cons
40. Zwickau	i) Ludwig Puttrich	12.1	73.6	5.4	5.1	Cons	SPD	SPD	SPD		
	ii) Wilhelm Stolle									SPD	SPD
Social Democratic Landtag caucus						1	3	4	4	5	5

*Notes:* SPD = Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD). Constituency occupational profiles as of 1871. Agriculture includes agriculture and forestry; industry includes mining, industry, and construction; commerce includes trade and transportation; other categories (e.g. army) were not included. For 2 Chemnitz and 4 Dresden, occupational profiles are for the entire city and were calculated by the author from SLTW, Table 12.

*Sources:* *SParl*, 199–211; SLTW, Tables 12, 20, 21.

after 1900. Each parliament had a kind of “plutocratic” suffrage, but the one-Thaler threshold for enfranchisement in Saxony could be overcome. Saxony’s introduction of a new income tax after 1876 increased the number of enfranchised electors, including many workers in the Lugau–Oelsnitz coal-mining basin where Liebknecht found his supporters. If these miners owned their own home, they already had the vote. The economic downturn beginning in 1873 also contributed to Liebknecht’s breakthrough. District and regional governors in Saxony had been reporting for some time about falling wages and unemployment: vagabonds and beggars—as well as arsonists, they claimed—were now found in Saxony’s small towns and villages.<sup>66</sup> Even in good economic times, the miners who supported Liebknecht in 1877 would have rallied to the socialist cause. But according to these civil servants, the “parties of order” contributed to Liebknecht’s victory with their apathy and inability to agree on a single anti-socialist candidate in a timely manner.<sup>67</sup> Saxon authorities succeeded in getting Liebknecht’s election annulled (he had not held Saxon citizenship for the required three years), but their victory was short-lived. Before year’s end the lawyer Otto Freytag won a by-election and became the first Social Democrat actually to sit in the Saxon Landtag.

The Landtag elections of September 1879 added two more SPD seats. Because of the Anti-Socialist Law, Social Democratic agitation remained “underground . . . until the last moment.”<sup>68</sup> Liebknecht was elected in the rural constituency of Leipzig II, which almost completely surrounded the *Messestadt*; Freytag was re-elected, and the lawyer Ludwig Puttrich won in a riding outside Zwickau. Authorities understood that skilled workers living in these suburbs also constituted a reservoir of Social Democratic votes, now and in the future. Once the Saxon income tax was fully phased in on 1 January 1879, many workers (earning between 600 and 700 Marks annually) paid state taxes that rose from 2.50 Marks to 3 Marks (1 Thaler)—exactly the threshold for enfranchisement.<sup>69</sup> Gustav Hübel, Zwickau’s regional governor and one of Social Democracy’s most determined enemies, complained six days before the 1879 Landtag election that “it is almost as though universal suffrage has befallen us here.”<sup>70</sup> Serving in the Leipzig regional administration, Cäsar von Witzleben was equally exasperated. Three weeks before the election, he reported that the Social Democrats were agitating energetically but as silently as possible: the party would probably announce some of its candidates only on the morning of the election.<sup>71</sup> Anti-socialist disunity also frustrated Dresden’s regional governor Kurt von Einsiedel. He knew that Liebknecht and Julius Vahlteich were likely candidates in the 10th and 16th rural constituencies—a house search had turned up the Social Democrats’ “complete action plan” for the

<sup>66</sup> SHStAD, KHMSD 107–8; cf. ZSSB 29, nos. 3–4 (1883): 196–202.

<sup>67</sup> SHStAD, MdI 5333; Schröder, “Wahlkampf,” 54.

<sup>68</sup> Acting envoy Biegeleben, 13.9.79, HHStAV, PAV/42.

<sup>69</sup> ZSSB 40, nos. 3–4 (1894): 201–31.

<sup>70</sup> For the following, KHMS Zwickau to MdI, 28.8.79, 3.9.79; KHMS Leipzig, 19/29.8.79; KHMS Dresden, 13/27.8.79 and “Zusammenstellung,” “Statistische Uebersicht . . . 1879,” SHStAD, MdI 5334.

<sup>71</sup> KHMS Leipzig to MdI, 14.9.79, SHStAD, MdI 5334; Schröder, “Wahlkampf,” 54.

latter riding. But the “parties of order” remained complacent and disunited: “one either underestimates socialism or wants to ignore it.”

Rural constituencies were not the only ones threatened. Social Democracy was “powerful” in both Dresden I and Dresden IV and in the 6th urban constituency west of the capital. Regional Governor Einsiedel predicted that some of these districts would likely fall too if socialist agitation were well enough funded—“perhaps from London.” Einsiedel was wrong about the 6th urban constituency, but his pessimism was typical of cases, like this one, where a by-election was contested outside the normal rotation of general elections. Saxon civil servants always feared the worst because the socialists were presented with an unexpected opportunity to show their strength. If that opportunity arose because a non-socialist incumbent had voluntarily resigned his seat, anger and frustration were all the greater and could lead to official recriminations.

Imposition of the Lesser State of Siege on Leipzig two weeks before the 1881 Landtag election achieved the hoped-for effect. Regional Governor Otto zu Münster of Leipzig remarked how quiet the campaign became after the initial expulsions. However, Münster’s opposite number in Zwickau remained on high alert. Social Democrats were distributing their propaganda mainly with the autumn Reichstag elections in mind, but they could still mobilize their “tightly-disciplined party organization” for Landtag campaigns. Foreign envoys and Saxon anti-socialists were glad to see the “good Saxon” Conservative Party take seven seats from the liberals and gain a secure majority. And only one more seat (won by Bebel) had been added to the SPD’s caucus. As Bavaria’s envoy wrote, “Numerically the socialists conquered nothing, but morally they suffered heavy losses.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet, all was not well. On election night Interior Minister Nostitz remarked that socialist “bellowing” had been strong everywhere during the campaign. The “parties of order” had exhibited “such a lack of insight” that moderate National Liberals had refused to join forces with Conservatives in a number of constituencies. Worse still, the Conservatives had courted defeat by nominating multiple candidates. The Prussian envoy Dönhoff was uncertain whether these features of the campaign had unnerved Nostitz or spurred him to carry the fight to the socialists. Either way, Dönhoff gave the “parties of order” only backhanded praise: “The conservative bloom in Saxony is at least not waning, and liberalism . . . has not increased in power and strength.” The Austrian envoy struck a similar note. Saxon ministers would now face both Liebknecht and Bebel in the Landtag, where they would “continue their rabble-rousing agitation from the speakers’ podium.”<sup>73</sup>

The issue of anti-socialist unity remained a bugbear until the end of the decade and beyond. National Liberals and Conservatives often butted heads about whether the “parties of order” should become coalition partners, form ad hoc alliances locally, or amalgamate into a single *Ordnungspartei* (which nay-sayers labeled an

<sup>72</sup> Dönhoff, 17.7.81, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 6; cf. report of 20.7.81 on Nostitz’s views, below; [acting Austrian envoy Sigismund von] Rosty, 13.8.81, HHStAV, PAV/43; Gasser, 16/17.7.81, BHStAM II, MA 2850; cf. BAmL, 765f.

<sup>73</sup> Rosty, 13.8.81, HHStAV, PAV/43.

*Ordnungsbrei*—a “porridge of order.”<sup>74</sup> Bismarck and Nostitz were uncertain too. Whereas some anti-socialists were optimistic about the future, others expressed worry.

Was the glass half-full or half-empty? The evidence can be read both ways—as it was at the time. Optimists took heart that the “parties of order” were slowly becoming more attentive to the threat of “subversion” (and taking initiatives to suppress it); they were learning to bury their differences (by forming temporary alliances); and they were beginning to use the electoral weapons at their disposal (or forge new ones). Yet, in the historical record, pessimists can be heard more often—and more loudly. Some of them, like Nostitz himself, were timid, anxious, and inconsistent. Others reacted to the threat of revolution with fear and loathing: like Prussian Interior Minister Puttkamer, they wanted to hit out hard and eradicate Social Democracy. But a different way of grouping these pessimists is plausible. Some of them believed that their political world would come crashing down quickly—through a sudden shock to the system, a serious lapse of judgment, or an isolated act of violence.<sup>75</sup> Others saw the same dark future as the endpoint of a slower process. German political culture would be eaten away gradually by the “rot” that Social Democrats introduced into it.

Both kinds of *Angst* were important in Germany in the first half of the 1890s, as we will see in Chapter 7. In Saxony, where five socialists sat in the Landtag after 1885, the latter scenario came to the fore: the revolution would be fought “not on the barricades but at the ballot box.”<sup>76</sup> The power of this prognosis should not be underestimated: it, too, focused the mind. As the American literary critic James Wolcott once wrote, “A lost election can have the jolt of a drop through the gallows door, leading to a dark night of the soul . . .”

## REICHSTAG BATTLES

Months before the Reichstag elections of October 1881, *Der Sozialdemokrat* provided party faithful with their marching orders: “We have to show that we still live!”<sup>77</sup> August Bebel later claimed that October 1881 represented the failure—the death—of Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law. “The moral effect on the party was enormous . . . From that point on we moved forward without interruption.”<sup>78</sup> The party historian Franz Mehring agreed: the law was now “a scrap of paper torn in shreds.”<sup>79</sup> Fast forward six years and we find National Liberals and Conservatives celebrating their victory in the “Kartell” elections of February 1887. Their Reichstag triumphs seemed to suggest that anti-socialism, when sustained with conviction, had a bright future.<sup>80</sup> The *Leipziger Tageblatt* sounded this note when Bebel was

<sup>74</sup> During the 1880s, Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha’s contributions to the organ of the German Society of Nobles, the *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, frequently attacked the idea of a National Liberal–Free Conservative–German Conservative “mish-mash party.” See Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 4–5.

<sup>75</sup> See e.g. Minister of War Alfred von Fabrice cited in Dönhoff, 10.5.82, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Gall, *Bismarck*, 2:171.

<sup>77</sup> *SD*, 6/20.2.81, cited in Bartel, *Sozialdemokrat*, 131.

<sup>78</sup> BAmL, 767.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Staudte, *Sie waren stärker*, 95.

<sup>80</sup> See inter alia Blum, *Lügen*, on the RT campaigns of 1887 and 1890.

defeated: "Hurrah! Since the advent of the Reichstag in 1871 the parties loyal to the Reich in Leipzig have not scored such a glorious victory nor one so crushing to the opponent."<sup>81</sup> The contrast between these two assessments is stark.

Was either one correct? In the Reichstag elections of October 1881, serious anti-socialist disunity occurred in eight of twenty-three Saxon races—a replication of 1878. In 1884 disunity occurred in seven constituencies, of which the Social Democrats won just two. This number was reduced still further in the "Kartell elections" of 1887: anti-socialist unity was maintained in all but two Saxon constituencies and the Social Democrats failed to elect a single deputy. However, when we consider what was at stake—and what contemporaries *thought* was at stake—in these elections, we can better understand how Social Democrats and their enemies appraised democracy's slow but not-so-steady advance.

The 1881 Reichstag campaign unfolded against the background of three years of cooperation between the Reich government and a Reichstag that was now willing to follow a conservative political course. During that time the Reichstag had passed the Anti-Socialist Law. It had also adopted protective tariffs on agricultural and industrial products, increased indirect (consumer) taxes, and begun to dismantle the *Kulturkampf*. By 1881 the National Liberal Party, having lost its left wing to the Secession, was more national than liberal. The German Conservative Party had begun to eclipse the Free Conservatives in size and influence. And the left-liberal camp, now with the addition of the Secessionists, had grown more bold in resisting protectionism and Bismarck's attempts to curtail civil liberties. Bismarck's aim in 1881 was to focus the enmity of German voters against the Left as a whole. When this was not possible, he counseled his supporters to concentrate first on the left liberals and secondarily on the Social Democrats. But the left liberals scored one of their greatest electoral victories in the "plebiscitary" elections of 1881—in obvious contrast to the "assassination elections" of 1878.

Did this signify a repudiation of Bismarckian policy by German voters? The jury is still out, though two scholars have reminded us that, if we count Reichstag seats, Bismarck's position vis-à-vis the Reichstag after 1881 was frankly disastrous<sup>82</sup> (see Table 4.6.). The Conservative parties had not fared well; the National Liberals had lost votes almost everywhere to the left liberals; and the Social Democrats had not been cowed into submission.<sup>83</sup> One observer in Dresden reported that Saxons had delivered "a vote of no confidence" in Bismarck.<sup>84</sup>

The Reichstag elections held in October 1884 again saw the Reich government focus its attacks on the left liberals and Social Democrats. Although the Secession and the Progressives had joined forces in the new German Radical Party in the spring of 1884, they were less successful at the polls this time around.<sup>85</sup> The left liberals were once again targeted by Bismarck as enemies of the Reich. This charge

<sup>81</sup> *LTBl* (22.2.87) cited in Schaal, "Methoden," 19–21.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson/Barkin, "Myth."

<sup>83</sup> See Engels (4.11.81) cited in Bartel/Schröder/Seeber, *Sozialistengesetz*, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Strachey, 28.10.81, 18.11.81, PRO, FO 68/165.

<sup>85</sup> See "German Radical Party, Founding Program (5 March 1884)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=686](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=686).



**Table 4.6.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1878 and 1881<sup>86</sup>

	30 July 1878				27 October 1881			
	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>								
German Conservatives		55,309	16.2	5		75,523	24.0	5
Free Conservatives		43,456	12.7	4		33,403	10.7	4
National Liberals		67,832	19.9	5		43,420	14.0	5
Other Liberals		—	—	—		14,083	4.5	1
Progressives		43,488	12.8	3		55,770	17.9	4
Social Democrats		128,039	37.6	6		87,786	28.2	4
Total votes cast	340,674			23	313,345			23
<b>Reich</b>								
German Conservatives		749,494	13.0	59		830,807	16.3	50
Free Conservatives		785,855	13.6	57		379,293	7.5	28
National Liberals		1,330,643	23.1	99		642,718	12.6	47
Other Liberals		222,255	3.9	13		533,203	10.5	55
Progressives		385,084	6.7	26		649,286	12.7	60
Social Democrats		437,158	7.6	9		311,961	23.2	12
Total votes cast	5,780,993			397	5,118,332			397

*Notes:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. Reich caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*). The Catholic Center Party and smaller groups have been omitted for clarity. See the tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

*Sources:* *SBDR*, 4. LP, II. Session (1879), Anlage 4, 38f., 50f., 56f.; *SBDR*, 5. LP, I. Session (1881), Anlage 64, 238f., 254f.; RWA, 39, 89.

<sup>86</sup> Online Supplements for this chapter provide maps showing Saxon Reichstag election results in 1878, 1881, and 1884. See also maps showing Saxon party bastions for these three elections. For a graphical overview of the 1884 RT election in the entire Reich, see also the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

**Table 4.7.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1884 and 1887

	28 October 1884				21 February 1887			
	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes cast (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>								
German Conservatives		82,353	22.7	8		124,586	24.0	8
Free Conservatives		42,572	11.8	3		53,931	10.4	4
National Liberals		64,316	17.7	3		161,348	31.1	10
Progressives, Radicals		44,246	12.2	4		29,873	5.7	1
Antisemites		—	0.0	0		—	0.0	0
Social Democrats		128,142	35.3	5		149,270	28.7	0
Total votes cast	364,602			23	522,025			23
<b>Reich</b>								
German Conservatives		861,063	15.2	78		1,147,200	15.2	80
Free Conservatives		387,687	6.9	28		736,389	9.8	41
National Liberals		997,033	17.6	51		1,677,979	22.2	99
Progressives, Radicals		997,004	17.6	74			14.1	32
Antisemites		—	0.0	0		11,593	0.2	1
Social Democrats		549,990	9.7	24		763,128	10.1	11
Total votes cast	5,681,628			397	7,570,710			397

*Notes:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. Reich caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*). The Catholic Center Party and smaller groups have been omitted for clarity. See the tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

*Sources:* *SBDR*, 6. LP, I. Session, Anlage 158, 642f., 658f.; *SBDR*, 7. LP, I. Session (1887), Anlage 73, 658f., 672f.; *RWA*, 39f., 89.

stuck because the National Liberals had moved more decisively into the pro-government camp and because the socialist threat had receded somewhat. But neither colonies nor Bismarck's social reform legislation<sup>87</sup> proved to be compelling issues around which to mobilize national voters: Bismarck's expectation that "state socialism will drum itself through"<sup>88</sup> was too optimistic. In 1884 the main political parties experienced no dramatic shifts in their share of the popular vote or seats won (see Table 4.7). For the next three years Bismarck's ability to muster majorities for government bills often suffered shipwreck on cooperation between Centrists and left liberals who defended states' rights, ethnic minorities, or civil liberties. Meanwhile the Social Democrats continued to spread their message.<sup>89</sup>

The Reichstag elections of February 1887 resurrected the winning formula of 1878. Bismarck was able to divide German parties into two groups: those who supported the Army Bill over which the Reichstag was unexpectedly dissolved in January 1887 and those who opposed it. The possibility of war with France increased the public's willingness to support the government's preferred candidates. After a short but intense campaign, voters turned out in droves. The participation rate rose from roughly 61 percent in 1884 to almost 78 percent in 1887—a figure not matched until 1907. Although the Kartell parties campaigned no more intensely than the left liberals and socialists, they mobilized a high proportion of voters who had not been eligible to vote in 1884 or had abstained from voting.<sup>90</sup> Bismarck was able (for the last time) to highlight the contrast between pro- and anti-governmental parties. The trick worked as well in Saxony as elsewhere, though differently. By 1887 the decline of Saxon left liberalism had become a rout, "celebrated by the Conservatives with war-whoops of exultation."<sup>91</sup> That the Saxon contingent in the SPD's Reichstag caucus was reduced from five to nil spurred the Kartell parties to boast that their kingdom had shown the rest of the Reich how to eliminate the contagion of Social Democracy. This was too much for the British envoy George Strachey. Jubilation on the part of the Kartell parties, he wrote, had now attained "that maximum of ferocity to political opponents, that alacrity in trampling on the defeated, which is so characteristic of the new Germany."

## IN THE TRENCHES

Our comrades recently held a conference . . . in a beautiful corner of our Saxon land. The "room" in which we met was surrounded by undulating cornfields; . . . the walls were decorated with leaves and the floor was covered with a velvety carpet of herbs and flowers. Because the conveners, . . . through

<sup>87</sup> See Ayass/Tennstedt/Winter, *Sozialbotschaft*, vol. 1, *Grundfragen*, esp. XV–XXIV.

<sup>88</sup> Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, 3:44 (diary entry of 26.6.81).

<sup>89</sup> Strachey, 31.10.84, PRO, FO 68/168.

<sup>90</sup> Sperber, *Voters*, 199f. Cf. Retallack/Dufour, "Non-Voter."

<sup>91</sup> Strachey, 4.3.87, PRO, FO 68/171, and for the following.

forgetfulness, had neglected to inform the police, we had to do without the luxury of one or more doormen.

—*Der Sozialdemokrat*, reporting on a secret meeting  
outside Dresden, 1883<sup>92</sup>

The workings of fear tend to be furtive.

—Michael Tomansky, “The Dangerous Election” (2016)<sup>93</sup>

Article 17 of the Reichstag voting law (1869) permitted all Germans to form district-wide election committees and election clubs as soon as an election was announced. One scholar has noted rightly that the effect of §17 on Germans’ freedom to campaign in Reichstag elections was “incalculable,” and “its greatest beneficiary was Social Democracy.” But as the same scholar demonstrated, the “shield of immunity” this law provided for campaign activity was still a patchwork in the 1870s and 1880s. “Going by the rules” and the “charmed interval” of election time—the span of six weeks or so between official announcement of a general election and voting day—allowed opponents of the authoritarian state to use the law to their own advantage. Gradually, Catholics, Poles, Social Democrats, left liberals, and other out-groups found ways to overturn elections that had been tainted by mispractice.<sup>94</sup> Early on, however, the targets of coercion paid a high price in lost employment, time in prison, and humiliation. The chicanery deployed against these outgroups failed to prevent them from winning elections. The Center and the Social Democrats learned how to exert their own kinds of coercion, and with their strength in the Reichstag they were able to oppose Bismarck’s wishes on many fronts, particularly in the 1880s.

When we examine election battles fought at the local level, we are reminded how long it took and how much effort it required to realize the free vote in practice, not just in theory. Without getting swallowed up in the muck of individual election protests, three general points can be made.

First, Landtag election campaigns were more subject to the anti-socialist whims of local authorities than Reichstag campaigns, even though protests against malfeasance could also be raised and debated on the floor of the Landtag. Yet in both kinds of campaigns, combat in the pubs and streets of Saxony spilled over into municipal council chambers, the courts, and the press. In these venues, Germans debated what electoral “fairness” really meant, but always in the context of a state governed by the rule of law. When we as historians listen to those debates, we should remember that fair and unfair do not map onto legal and illegal. When large industrialists or owners of landed estates punished their subordinates for “voting wrongly,” they were certainly unfair; but they were not acting illegally as long as they could not be proven to have violated the secrecy of

<sup>92</sup> *SD*, 12.7.83, cited in Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 380.

<sup>93</sup> *New York Review of Books* 63, no. 5 (24 March 2016): 6.

<sup>94</sup> Anderson, *Democracy*, 277–94, esp. 289–91; idem, “Voter.”

the ballot or the accuracy of the count. Clergy and socialists were also “unfair” but not illegal when they exerted undue influence on voters who depended on them. But the opposite case also presented contemporaries with a dilemma. When government influence was exerted—for example when a regional governor added his name to an election flyer supporting a Conservative candidate—that *was* illegal. Yet it might also be “fair.” As some of the following examples show, state ministers in Saxony and in the Reich believed it was not only their right, but also their duty, to let the voting public know which candidates they hoped would win the election. This view of electoral politics is far removed from today’s system in most parliamentary democracies, where the civil service usually maintains some degree of independence from elected officials; but it influenced the way contemporaries defined liberty, freedom, and choice (on the one hand) and repression, manipulation, and coercion (on the other).

Second, there were many gray zones where election battles overlapped with other kinds of anti-socialist activity: in the army and veterans’ associations, in municipal assemblies, in trade unions and cultural associations, and in the wave of strikes and boycotts that erupted after 1886. Different views of electoral fairness raised thorny questions here, too. Should soldiers and civil servants be compelled to support the state they served? Should they be allowed to campaign on behalf of “state-supporting” candidates or otherwise try to influence voters’ choices? What was the best way to counter Social Democratic boycotts against publicans and shopkeepers who depended on working-class clients to stay afloat? Again we discover good reasons not to distinguish too categorically between “election time,” which was certainly not always “charmed,” and other periods.

Third and last, we can consider the reciprocal relationship between dirty tricks in the realms of high and low politics. This reciprocity was especially apparent when an “epidemic” of election protests put Saxony in the national spotlight after 1881 and when Bismarck sought ways to limit the power of the Reichstag after 1886. More important than deciding whether Saxon civil servants were ruthless or inept is to see how democracy’s enemies *reacted* to revelations of electoral abuse. It is also necessary to put Saxony’s anti-socialist tactics in the context of Bismarck’s grand strategy to offset the effects of universal manhood suffrage. Saxon ministers pursued policies at the regional level that were multifaceted and protean. But the separate strands of Bismarck’s policy cannot easily be disentangled either. Those strands held together, or split apart, according to time and place. In Saxony and the Reich, the 1880s were both repressive and transformative.

#### THE CHEMNITZ ROPE AFFAIR

“Tied up like a bundle of cigars . . .” That is how socialists described the treatment doled out to Landtag candidates Julius Vahlteich, Philipp Wiemer, and eighteen of their supporters when an overzealous but understaffed police inspector lassoed them with a clothesline and dragged them off to jail on 6 September 1879. The “Chemnitz rope affair” became a *cause célèbre* that exercised public opinion in

Saxony in the winter of 1879/80.<sup>95</sup> The victims and perpetrators of the Chemnitz “outrage” offered such divergent accounts of the incident that fact and fiction cannot be separated: socialist indignation fueled partisan exaggeration, and official embarrassment generated hollow apologetics.<sup>96</sup> The incident is quickly told but its ramifications spread outward like ripples on a pond. The first reverberation was felt by Vahlteich when he suffered defeat in the Landtag elections held on Tuesday, 9 September 1879—just three days after he had been hauled off to jail. Vahlteich’s defeat produced an official protest that was debated in parliament and in Saxon newspapers. Police directors and state ministers tried damage control, with little success, for it turns out that being “tied up like a bundle of cigars” was not the only indignity perpetrated on Vahlteich and his committee.

The evening of 6 September 1879 did not begin innocently. When Vahlteich and his committee met in Geilhard’s Restaurant, tensions were already high. Local authorities had banned an election rally and prevented the socialists from issuing a poster that, without mentioning Vahlteich’s party, appealed for votes. Both actions were standard practice in Saxony under the Anti-Socialist Law, which had been in effect for almost a year. As election day approached, gendarmes also confiscated Social Democratic ballots and, according to some reports, arrested dozens of ballot distributors. On 6 September, after one of their rallies had been dissolved by the police, Vahlteich and his election committee reconvened in a side-room of Geilhard’s. Although they were waiting for election flyers being printing in the kitchen, they took the precaution of leaving open the door to the main room. Suddenly, around 9:30 p.m., Police Inspector Carius entered the restaurant brusquely and declared that everyone in the side-room was under arrest. Carius had only four policemen with him, and they now faced the task of getting the twenty socialists through the streets to holding cells in city hall—some distance away. By the time Carius and his charges exited the restaurant, a crowd of workers had gathered.

They were in no mood to be deputized. At that point someone produced a clothesline, which Carius strung around the prisoners and held tightly at the back of the pack. Thus he marched them off to jail, where they were interrogated briefly and released over the following few hours. Vahlteich, however, was detained until after election day. Eventually all twenty socialists were charged with contravening Saxony’s association law. After considerable delay they were tried on 28 June 1880. The socialist lawyer and Landtag deputy Otto Freytag represented the defendants so ably that Saxon police were said to be the ones on trial. Initial convictions were handed down but overturned upon appeal. The authorities’ defeat seemed complete; but there was more to come. At some point after September 1879 Police Inspector Carius was exposed for embezzling police funds. Allegedly he had orchestrated the dramatic action of 6 September to win approval from his superiors,

<sup>95</sup> *Leinen-Affäre*. Cf. Strauss/Finsterbusch, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 45–8; *SParl*, 39; Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe,” 54.

<sup>96</sup> Dönhoff, 12.9.79, 3.12.79, 3.3.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bde. 1–3; Franckenstein, 6.12.79, HHStAV, PAV/42.

hoping, upon promotion, to secure a new loan to pay off his debts. He may actually have received a reward from the interior ministry in Dresden. Another rumor had it that Carius had received hints from the interior ministry and the state prosecutor that Saxony could not afford a "socialist" election if it were to escape the wrath of Berlin.<sup>97</sup> For whatever reason, Carius took his own life a few months later.

The Social Democrats submitted an election protest to the Landtag which was sent to committee and then debated in plenary session on 2 December 1879.<sup>98</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht and Otto Freytag pressed their party's case vigorously. Only sophistic responses were offered by speakers from the "parties of order."<sup>99</sup> Interior Minister Nostitz's chagrin was palpable. He agreed that the Chemnitz police "had gone too far." His more sincere regret was that the police action had provided the SPD with the perfect opportunity "to use this situation for its own partisan purposes."<sup>100</sup> Three months later the "Chemnitz rope affair" had still not faded from view.<sup>101</sup> The "exceptionally favorable effects of the Anti-Socialist Law," Nostitz declared in March 1880, were jeopardized by such police actions: they threatened to turn back the clock to a time when Social Democrats had been able, without legal consequences, to "inflict upon the lower classes their systematic denigration of religion, authority, and the law."

In the face of irrefutable evidence of wrong-doing, Landtag deputies voted forty-five to twenty-six to reject the SPD protest and confirm the election of Vahlteich's opponent, Karl Ruppert. This decision was music to the ears of the Prussian envoy in Dresden. He had seen Saxon authorities squirm under the spotlight of public scrutiny since the previous September. Now things were looking up. The Landtag deputies had recognized that if they declared Ruppert's election invalid they would give the socialists a second chance to win the seat. Hence their decision was taken as a "welcome symptom" that Saxon parties were willing to make common cause against the enemy.

#### DRESDEN-ALTSTADT

The Reichstag constituency of 5: Dresden-Old City held great symbolic value for the "parties of order" and for Social Democrats. By 1881 the two constituencies that surrounded it (Saxony 4 and 6) had been held for more than a decade by high-profile Conservatives, Friedrich von Schwarze and Gustav Ackermann. Their re-election in 1881 was not seriously threatened. Although Bebel was nominated in thirty-four other constituencies across Germany, he devoted almost all his time and energy to the Dresden campaign. Saxon ministers so feared Bebel's attacks from the floor of the Landtag that they adjourned it during the Reichstag campaign. Only the Landtag's ceremonial opening occurred as usual in the first week of September.

<sup>97</sup> Stern, *Kampf*, 1:126.

<sup>98</sup> SD, 1.12.81, and other sources in Schüller, "Kampf," 91ff., 100ff.

<sup>99</sup> *LT Mitt* 1878/80, II.K., 1:171–89 (2.12.79) and 2:925–51 (17.2.80).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Dönhoff's two reports, both 3.12.79, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 2.

<sup>101</sup> For the following, Dönhoff, 3.3.80, cited previously.

By squeezing in an interpellation about the Lesser State of Siege before the adjournment, Bebel and Liebknecht added a "tactless note of discord" to the proceedings.<sup>102</sup> But the government ducked that jab and counterpunched by reducing a temporary surtax by 30 percent. Taxes, tariffs, and economic hardship were important issues in the 1881 election campaign—another reason to prorogue the Landtag for a few months (it reconvened on 5 November, less than ten days after the Reichstag vote). The Conservative *Dresdner Nachrichten* admitted openly that the maneuver was intended to silence Social Democratic "firebrands" during the Reichstag campaign.<sup>103</sup>

Disunity among the non-socialist parties characterized the 1881 Reichstag campaign.<sup>104</sup> Saxons' political antennae were soon attuned to the contest in Dresden-Old City above all others. About the political heavyweight each party was sending into the election ring, everyone had an opinion.<sup>105</sup> One observer wrote that "a glance at the election field in Saxony reveals chaos." Compared to three years earlier, "the state-supporting parties of order . . . believe that they can enjoy the luxury of attacking one another. In many constituencies they are presenting three to four nominees, as in Dresden."<sup>106</sup> Another observer reported that "the decomposition of the old parties . . . [had] now reached such lengths" that Saxons would be voting for seven separate parties.<sup>107</sup> While the Prussian Dönhoff was on vacation, Bismarck received a campaign report from the Conservative Gustav Ackermann, which focused almost exclusively on 5: Dresden-Old City. Ackermann expected Bebel to win the seat. The Progressives and antisemites in Dresden refused to support the Conservative-National Liberal compromise candidate, and if a run-off ballot pitted the antisemitic candidate against Bebel, Ackermann could not guess what the National Liberals would do.<sup>108</sup>

When he returned from vacation, Dönhoff was aghast at what he saw. The Social Democrats in Saxony had nominated candidates in constituencies they had never before contested. When they had been prevented from holding their own rallies, they had flooded those of their opponents. They had amassed a war-chest that allegedly included 10,000 Marks from America. They were paying three Marks a day to women—of whom fifty had already been arrested by local authorities—to smuggle copies of election flyers into Dresden, in tin boxes resembling those in

<sup>102</sup> Gasser, 28.9.81, BHStAM II, MA 2850. The following also draws on reports of 24/30.10.81, 8/11/28.11.81, *ibid.*; *LTMitt* 1881/82, II.K., 1:3ff. (5-6.9.81).

<sup>103</sup> BAmL, 783.

<sup>104</sup> Schüller, "Kampf," 106ff.; Schmidt, "Organisationsformen"; Schmidt, "Arbeiterorganisationen"; Schmidt, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 50–2; Kühn, *Erinnerungen*, 15–19; Dönhoff, 19/29.5.81, 10.6.81, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 3; NAZ, 22.5.81; BAP, Rkz 1811.

<sup>105</sup> Besides works cited previously, the following relies on Dönhoff's reports (or those of his subordinate Count von Waldenburg), 9/30.8.81, 15/20/22/27.9.81, 3/6/13/19/22/25/28.10.81, 11/15/16/28.11.81, 1/20.12.81, and Madai to Puttkamer, 10.11.81 (copy), PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vols. 4–5; reports in SHStAD, KHMSD 1067–8; Mdl 10998–10998a; Mdl 5379–80; MdAA 3295; BAmL, 766–80; Marx, "Reichstagswahl"; Schüller, "Kampf," 130–50; Richter, *Geschichte*, 59f.

<sup>106</sup> Gasser to Bavarian FO, 24.10.81, cited previously.

<sup>107</sup> Strachey to British FO, 26.10.81, cited previously.

<sup>108</sup> Ackermann to Puttkamer, n.d. (copy), appended to Puttkamer to Bismarck, 31.8.81, BAP, Rkz 1811.



which condensed milk was sent from Switzerland and which were posted from villages in Baden.<sup>109</sup> Saxon officials used all measures at their disposal to repress and harass the socialists, but Social Democrats responded with cloak-and-dagger tactics. Dönhoff had heard that women distracted border officials with promises of sexual favors to smuggle the Social Democrats' election flyers into Dresden, which were then distributed by party runners, pushed under doors, or attached to bell-pulls.<sup>110</sup> Here Dönhoff may have been sold a bill of goods: sex for smuggling does not fit with what we know about the SPD's insistence on respectability. But other strategies to deflect repression were certainly in play.

For two years the SPD had been expanding and refining its underground organization to get *Der Sozialdemokrat* from Zurich across the German border. Between elections this activity continued unabated.<sup>111</sup> By 1888 some 400 copies of the newspaper were distributed every week to readers in Dresden: fewer copies reached Chemnitz (290) but many more (800) reached Leipzig<sup>112</sup> (see Map 4.1). During the Reichstag campaign of 1881, Saxon police and local administrators focused on confiscating copies of Bebel's election flyers and, whenever possible, the presses on which they were printed. Berlin police spies in Saxony were unable to take action themselves, but their reports undercut the self-serving claims of Saxon authorities that the socialists had been silenced. Even though Bebel's supporters had allegedly been hamstrung during the last two weeks of the Landtag campaign in July 1881, one Prussian informant reported the following clandestine operation on the eve of the election: "In the garden of Hildebrandt's Restaurant, 14 Plagwitzerstraße, the socialists assembled to distribute [Bebel's] election flyer [in the 3rd urban constituency]. About forty people had gathered by 8:30 p.m. Around 8 p.m., twelve men set out with five packets (2,500 flyers); a quarter-hour later seven men set out with four packets (2,000 copies): together these were to cover the southern neighborhoods. The rest were distributed in the west quarter. I could not remain long enough to determine whether other people were there to cover the 1st constituency: I had to remove myself in order not to come under suspicion, since police officials had shown up in the meantime."<sup>113</sup> Dönhoff reported similar activity in the Conservative bastions of Großenhain and Meißen. To convene a meeting, socialists traveled by train to a predetermined transfer point, received instructions about where to go next, and proceeded in small groups into the countryside to the designated meeting place "under open skies." When such gatherings could be pulled off, they boosted Social Democratic confidence.

Dönhoff also raised the issue of whether the Lesser State of Siegfried ought to be imposed not only on Leipzig but now also on Dresden. The cost-benefit analysis he offered Bismarck revealed differences of outlook among those with a stake in the decision. The "parties of order" made a simple calculation: every vote that

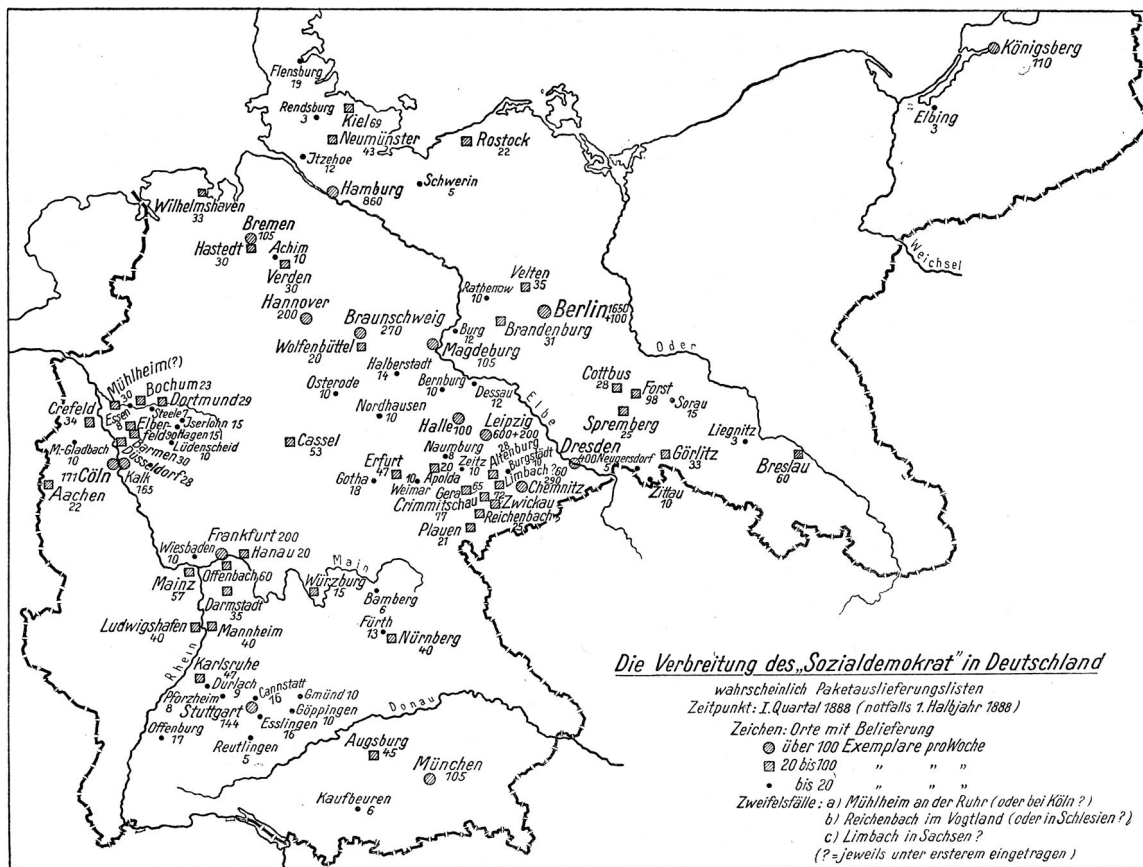
<sup>109</sup> Cf. Meerane city council to KHMS Zwickau, 17.10.81, SHStAD, KHMS Zwickau 2017.

<sup>110</sup> SHStAD, MdI 10998a.

<sup>111</sup> *SD*, 28.9.79; Engelberg, *Politik*; Bartel, *Marx*; Bartel, *Sozialdemokrat*; Lidtke, *Party*, 89ff.

<sup>112</sup> See Engelberg, *Politik*, esp. ch. 4; Bartel/Schröder/Seeber, *Sozialistengesetz*, 137.

<sup>113</sup> Unsigned report (Leipzig) to Madai (Berlin), 12.7.81, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12845.



**Map 4.1.** Distribution of *Der Sozialdemokrat* in Germany, 1888. Note the concentrations in Saxony and the Rhine–Ruhr district.

Source: Ernst Engelberg, *Revolutionäre Politik und Rote Feldpost 1878–1890* (Berlin-GDR, 1959), following 192.

Dresdeners cast for Bebel was a vote for adding Dresden to the list of cities on which §28 had been imposed. Saxon ministers took a different view. Although Dresden had become a Mecca for socialists banished from Berlin, Hamburg, and Leipzig, they concluded that "it would be better to keep the socialist leaders here in one pot, as it were, where the well-organized royal police force in the city, an experienced corps of gendarmes in its environs, and aggressive prosecutors could keep them under surveillance, rather than to invoke an exceptional law, send [the socialists] out into the countryside, and allow them to nest in the smaller localities, where that kind of assistance is not easily available or cannot be coordinated." This conclusion was seconded by Police Director Madai in Berlin, but for different reasons. Madai wrote to Prussian Interior Minister Puttkamer that imposing the Lesser State of Siege on Dresden would be ineffective. It should only be imposed to destroy particularly strong local branches of the SPD. But no such organization existed in Dresden. Madai concluded that if the Saxon government were to extend the Lesser State of Siege to other parts of its kingdom, then the manufacturing districts of Chemnitz, Zwickau, Glauchau, Meerane, and Crimmitschau would be better choices than Dresden, or at least as good.<sup>114</sup>

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As the 1881 Reichstag campaign in Dresden-Old City neared its climax, the Prussian Dönhoff and the Saxon Nostitz took turns predicting the worst.<sup>115</sup> Against all odds and at the last minute, Bebel had managed to print and distribute a campaign flyer to replace one that had been confiscated by the Dresden authorities: 30–40,000 copies were lost.<sup>116</sup> In reporting such successes Dönhoff's tone was appreciative: "Everywhere the government is using all means at its disposal to combat socialist propaganda. Election material is confiscated whenever there is the faintest opportunity to do so; election rallies that demonstrate a hint of socialist symptoms are dissolved as often as possible; §24 of the Anti-Socialist Law is being energetically used against distributors of election flyers; [and] arrests and house searches are being undertaken . . . The authorities here are making many a good catch: for example they arrested an individual who betrayed Liebknecht's entire election battle plan." For his part, Interior Minister Nostitz hoped that the Progressives, when faced with a run-off choice between a socialist and a Conservative, would vote for the latter.<sup>117</sup> Yet at the same time Nostitz engaged in his familiar hand-wringing in the face of the enemy's "ruthless" campaigning. Socialist propaganda was slipping through the government's hands; arrests were not having much impact; and socialists were gaining the upper hand by mobilizing tobacco workers.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> The preceding paragraph draws on correspondence, election reports, and flyers in BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12847.

<sup>115</sup> von der Planitz (Berlin) to Saxon MdAA, 5/6.11.81, SHStAD, MdAA 1405; SHStAD, SKAD 4493.

<sup>116</sup> Kühn, *Erinnerungen*, 15–18; BAmL, 768; Marx, "Reichstagswahl," 24–6.

<sup>117</sup> Dönhoff, 19.10.81, cited previously.

<sup>118</sup> Dönhoff, 13.10.81, and Gasser, 24.10.81, cited previously. Cf. SPD flyers in SHStAD, KHMSD 1068, some rpt. BARuS, 2:162–9, and for other parties, in SLUB, H. Sax. G. 199, 24.

Nostitz's characteristic mix of wishful thinking and pessimism eventually prompted the same reactions from Bismarck and his envoy Dönhoff as it had earlier in 1881 when the Lesser State of Siege was being planned for Leipzig. Bismarck ordered a newspaper article to be prepared under the rubric "Saxon Election Prospects" in order to clarify the policy statements that had been made by the Saxon parties and their Dresden candidates.<sup>119</sup> After citing the Saxons' reasons for not imposing the Lesser State of Siege on Dresden, Dönhoff echoed Bismarck's view that the Saxon government was to blame for letting things come this far.

If it had taken action sooner and more energetically to combat the socialist movement . . . [and] if it had taken the initiative to use the exceptional measures that the Anti-Socialist Law put in its hands, . . . then [the SPD] would not have become accustomed to regarding Saxony as its principal stomping ground . . . It may be true that government organs everywhere are now striking out energetically; but one has let the evil grow too large to be able now, when elections are upon us, suddenly to render it harmless with harsh measures.<sup>120</sup>

The thirty-six hours preceding the opening of the polls on 27 October 1881 heightened the election drama. After placing an advertisement in a local newspaper announcing that he would distribute preprinted ballots at Max Kayser's Cigar Shop the night before the poll, Bebel received grudging acknowledgment from the local police that he had successfully enhanced his personal standing among Dresden voters.<sup>121</sup> Saxon authorities found an excuse to close Kayser's shop at 10:15 p.m. But the next morning it was packed with socialist supporters who wanted "to collect a ballot along with their Sunday cigar."

The scene in Dresden's Altmarkt on the evening of 27 October 1881 was described in the opening pages of this book.<sup>122</sup> Recall that when the police attempted to clear the square, they fired blank rounds at the crowd and a nearby military unit was called in. An indeterminate number of Dresdeners were injured and stiff jail sentences were meted out. These measures hardly satisfied Dresden's regional governor or Prussia's envoy. When they conferred the next morning they agreed that a new military barracks should be located in Dresden's *Altstadt*: units stationed across the river could not respond quickly enough if election violence erupted again in the future. "Yesterday's disturbance has also shown how deeply Dresden's population—which usually reacts to all other sorts of provocation with exemplary calm and reverence for authority—must have been stirred up by the socialists to let itself be carried away to such acts of disorderliness."<sup>123</sup>

When their candidate was eliminated in the initial round of Reichstag voting, local antisemites swung their support in the run-off behind the compromise

<sup>119</sup> Marginalia to Dönhoff, 13.10.81, cited previously.

<sup>120</sup> Dönhoff, 6.10.81, cited previously, with Bismarck's marginalia.

<sup>121</sup> Polizei-Direktion Dresden to KHMS Dresden, 5.11.81, SHStAD, KHMSD 1068.

<sup>122</sup> SHStAD, MdI 10998a.

<sup>123</sup> Dönhoff, 28.10.81, 1.12.81, cited previously. Voting returns from the Reichstag election in 5: Dresden-Altstadt in 1881 are found in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

Conservative-National Liberal candidate, Dresden mayor Paul Stübel, and the Progressives could not decide whether to abstain from voting in the run-off election. The socialists moved into the breach. Despite even closer police scrutiny they rushed into print four more election flyers and a newly composed song.<sup>124</sup> The Conservatives countered with fear-mongering. They claimed that a victory for Bebel would drive the patrons of artisans' shops to other German cities such as Stuttgart and Weimar. Without a hint of irony the editor of the *Dresdner Nachrichten* put it this way: "In a free election the inhabitants of Saxony's capital, the seat of the royal court, will decide the future reputation and importance that Dresden will enjoy in the German Fatherland . . . One thing is clear: Bebel is the one-sided partisan candidate, Stübel is the communal people's candidate!"<sup>125</sup>

On 10 November 1881 the voting went smoothly, and Bebel lost the run-off election to Stübel. Less than an hour after the outcome was announced, a telegram was on its way from Stübel's election committee to Bismarck in Berlin: "Brilliant victory of Mayor Stübel over Bebel. Hail to the Kaiser, with his great chancellor."<sup>126</sup> A satirical cartoon depicted the joy of Dresden burghers in seeing their mayor enter the Reichstag and bidding "Adieu August!" A boot labeled "10 November 1881" registers its protest on the backside of the Social Democratic leader. Bent and humbled against the Dresden skyline, Bebel is leaving town to peddle the cigars in a suitcase marked Max Kayser & Co.<sup>127</sup> Dresden's socialists had "thrown their last reserves into the battle" and lost. Bebel's defeat left his party without its best Reichstag orator—temporarily.<sup>128</sup>

#### PRAETORIANS?

The authorities' reaction to the Dresden tumult in 1881 reflected anxieties about the reliability of the army as a tool of the authoritarian state. Was it still a defender of middle-class values and a bulwark against Social Democracy?<sup>129</sup> We know too little about the roles played by members of the military and veterans' associations (*Kriegervereine*) at election time, but their force of numbers cannot be denied. In the mid-1870s almost 23,000 active military personnel lived in Saxony.<sup>130</sup> Ten years later the League of Saxon Veterans' Associations had 954 local branches with 102,633 members, growing to about 125,000 members by 1890.

Even before the Anti-Socialist Law was passed in 1878, Dresden watering holes frequented by Social Democrats were designated off-limits for soldiers. In the first winter of the Anti-Socialist Law regional governors across Saxony were pressured by the interior and war ministries to drive all known socialists out of veterans'

<sup>124</sup> *Stichwählerlied*, in Marx, "Reichstagswahl," Appendix 12.

<sup>125</sup> *DN*, 9.11.81; Gasser, 11.11.81, cited previously.

<sup>126</sup> BAP, Rkz 1812. <sup>127</sup> SLUB, H. Sax. G., 199, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Bebel reentered the Reichstag in June 1883, representing Hamburg.

<sup>129</sup> Schüller, "Kampf," 112–24; Schmidt, "Organisationsformen," 359ff.; Schmidt, *Arbeiterbewegung*, 63–5; Bebel's RT speech (4.12.88), BARuS, 2:508–15; Pöls, *Sozialistenfrage*, 57f.

<sup>130</sup> *ZSSB* 22, nos. III/IV (1876): 317–19.

associations or disband those “infected” beyond redress.<sup>131</sup> This directive was largely ignored because of the impossibility of carrying it out.<sup>132</sup> A list of veterans’ associations provided by the district governor in Borna (south of Leipzig) suggests the scale of the problem. In his jurisdiction, twenty-one veterans’ associations included a total of 2,111 members. This list revealed that “almost all these associations hold a more or less large number of members who belong to the Social Democratic Party or at least affiliate themselves with it.”<sup>133</sup> Such “infiltration” was even more worrisome in Saxony’s big cities, above all Dresden.<sup>134</sup>

Saxon War Minister Fabrice subscribed to the logic that, as Social Democrats became quieter within army ranks, their influence became more dangerous. He felt they were “waiting to spot the appropriate moment for a massive revolutionary outburst.” Based on reports from Leipzig, Fabrice observed in September 1883 that socialists in the Saxon army had been given orders by their party leaders to maintain silence and avoid any public display of their political sympathies during their years of service. The last Landtag elections, Fabrice claimed, had demonstrated that socialists were highly disciplined and willing to forgo open agitation for the moment. He saw a clear correlation between the socialists’ underground activity during the election campaign and their quiet subversion in army barracks.<sup>135</sup>

The question of the army’s reliability was no less acute in 1887, when Saxony’s veterans’ associations were mobilized as part of the Reichstag election campaign to pass Bismarck’s Army Bill. Conservative newspapers and War Minister Fabrice expressed satisfaction that the veterans had understood Germany’s security needs. In the Landtag elections that followed in the autumn, they also did “their duty as old soldiers.”<sup>136</sup> They helped defeat all socialist candidates except Bebel in Leipzig I. Fabrice was eager to see the values espoused by Saxony’s veterans’ associations permeate all social classes rather than have working-class opposition infect army ranks. To that end he did not agree with one right-wing newspaper when it suggested that more *officers* should join the veterans’ associations. If they did so, other members would feel “commandeered” and perhaps driven into opposition ranks. Fabrice believed that veterans could be trusted to do the right thing without intervention from high-ranking officers or state ministers. As he put it, “one can accomplish a great deal” if members recruited from the ranks of junior field officers and common soldiers “are asked to behave appropriately.” As an example “of how willingly these people follow orders,” the war minister cited Kaiser Wilhelm I’s visit to Dresden in 1882. When it became apparent that the Dresden garrison would be away on maneuvers and could not assist with the necessary security measures, more

<sup>131</sup> MdI directive of 24.12.78 in Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 360.

<sup>132</sup> Dönhoff, 2.4.79; Nostitz to Dönhoff (copy), 9.5.79, and other materials in GStAB, GsD, IV A 43.

<sup>133</sup> AHMS Borna to KHMS Leipzig, 7.2.79, with “Uebersicht... Januar 1879,” SHStAD, KHMSL 246.

<sup>134</sup> Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 361.

<sup>135</sup> Dönhoff, 27.9.83, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 9.

<sup>136</sup> Dönhoff, 20.10.87, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Vol. 1.

than 3,000 veterans enthusiastically stepped into the breach. They maintained “exemplary order” during the Kaiser’s ceremonial arrival and torchlight procession.

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In 1880–81, a central argument supporting imposition of the Lesser State of Siege on Leipzig was that Social Democrats were being elected as municipal assemblymen and counselors<sup>137</sup> in the working-class villages surrounding the city. This complaint was not as new as Police Director Madai and others made it sound. Between 1869 and 1875 Social Democrats had been elected to local assemblies in Pieschen, Plagwitz, Lindenau, Reudnitz, and Stötteritz. The first Social Democrat entered Schönefeld’s local council in 1876. Even two months after the Anti-Socialist Law was passed, in December 1878, the socialist Oswald Stelzer was elected to the local council of Reudnitz, and victories were also registered in Gohlis, Connewitz, and other suburbs.<sup>138</sup> In the same month Bebel and Leipzig Progressives formed a fifteen-person committee to organize opposition to the dominant National Liberals in Leipzig proper. The communal party landscape became more differentiated.<sup>139</sup> In the Leipzig elections held that month, the National Liberal list won with 2,580 votes; the more liberal City Association attracted 1,389 votes; the socialist-left-liberal Citizens’ Committee received 610 votes; and the Conservative Association gained 440 votes. This success in Leipzig was fleeting: it foundered when sympathy between socialists and left liberals evaporated in 1879 and when the SPD’s 1883 Copenhagen congress issued a statement against cooperation or alliances with any other party. Nevertheless, in his overviews of the socialist movement written in June and December 1880, Berlin Police Director Madai referred to the party’s “still undiminished strength” in Leipzig’s suburbs and the future danger of renewed cooperation between left liberals and socialists.<sup>140</sup> By that point, a total of seventy-six Social Democrats sat in the parliaments of twenty-five localities in the region of Leipzig.<sup>141</sup>

Socialists were advancing elsewhere too. In the 1870s socialists also won election to local assemblies in Meerane, Hohenstein, Crimmitschau, and other towns in this heavily industrialized region. Dresden presented a thornier problem.<sup>142</sup> The elections there in late 1879 represented the high tide of socialist hopes. Agitating among railroad workers and small businessmen in Dresden-New City, the socialists

<sup>137</sup> Assemblymen (*Stadtverordneten*) sat in the lower chamber of municipal parliaments; counselors (*Stadträte*) sat in the upper chamber. On gerrymandering and other practices to hinder Social Democrats in municipal, state-level, and national elections in and around Leipzig, and for maps showing Leipzig’s neighborhoods and suburbs, see Retallack, “Mapping the Red Threat.” See also Plate 3 for a map of the Reichstag election in 13: Leipzig-County in 1887.

<sup>138</sup> Rudloff, *Leipzig*, 48; Adam, *Arbeitermilieu*, 285; *LVZ*, 22.12.78, in Staudé, *Sie waren stärker*, 114.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:336–40.

<sup>140</sup> “Übersicht” (10.6.80), Fricke/Knacke, *Dokumente*, 1:52; “Übersicht” (31.12.80), BAP, Rkz 646/6.

<sup>141</sup> Staudé, *Sie waren stärker*, 112–17.

<sup>142</sup> For the following, Schüller, “Kampf,” 74ff.; Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 265–70, 348f.; Kühn, *Erinnerungen*, 12. On Crimmitschau, Schaarschmidt, *Geschichte*, 108ff.

received 1,100 votes to their opponents' 1,200. But the "parties of order" immediately launched a campaign to encourage their supporters to apply for local citizenship and did their best to prevent socialist workers from doing the same. The crucial criterion of "independence" was defined as narrowly as possible by Dresden's city fathers. For example, if the "independent" head of a household supplemented his salary with waged labor, or if he sublet a room in his lodgings to a third party, or if he had been convicted of a minor offence years earlier, he could be denied the right to vote locally.<sup>143</sup> These tactics succeeded so well in the municipal elections in 1880 that a socialist victory in Dresden was considered "out of the question"<sup>144</sup> for the time being. The picture was less bleak in Dresden's hinterland. In the autumn of 1880 Social Democrats were able to win a significant number of seats in suburbs where artisans and factory workers predominated. In the administrative district of Pirna to the southeast, socialists were elected in Polenz, Zaschendorf, and Gersdorf. In the district of Freiberg to the southwest they did well in mining communities. But when a socialist won a seat in Meißen the district governor refused to confirm his election.

In the 1880s the "parties of order" realized that municipal politics offered them a unique opportunity to revise the electoral rules of the game. Citizens in the Leipzig suburbs of Lindenau and Gohlis set the ball rolling with petitions to the Saxon Landtag advocating reform of the municipal suffrage. Authorities and councilors in other localities soon joined the chorus. They claimed that young adults in rural communities were exercising their right to vote in order to advance "special interests" contrary to the public welfare. In 1886 the Saxon government responded by introducing a bill into the Landtag that proposed raising the voting age from twenty-one to twenty-five and increasing the local residency requirements from one year to two. At the same time an exhaustive questionnaire was introduced for those wishing to apply for local citizenship. August Bebel protested against these revisions, but the five Social Democrats in the Landtag could not prevent the bill from passing on 24 April 1886. The new measures supplemented existing rules that gave property-owners much greater representation on municipal parliaments than those without a house or land.<sup>145</sup> The "parties of order" learned the important lesson that the rise of Social Democracy could be held in check, at least on a small scale, by such means. Ten years later this strategy was applied on a broader front and acquired a new label: suffrage robbery.

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As in Silesia and the Rhineland, strikes and lockouts in Saxony affected hundreds of employers and hundreds of thousands of workers between 1886 and 1889.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Hirsch/Lindemann, *Wahlrecht* (1911), 34.

<sup>144</sup> *SD*, 15.12.81. On Dresden, Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Gideon von Rudhart, 29.11.85, BHStAM II, MA 2854.

<sup>145</sup> *Ansässige and Unansässige*. Hirsch/Lindemann, *Wahlrecht* (1911), 30–7; Nitzsche, *Gemeindepolitik*, 56–62; Schaarschmidt, *Geschichte*, 68f.; Häpe, "Sachsen," 8–29.

<sup>146</sup> See Rudhart, 22.4.86, BHStAM II, MA 2855; cf. Staude, *Sie waren stärker*, 140–5, 159–65; Schmidt, "Organisationsformen," 381–6; BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12849.



Socialists soon deployed a counter-measure—the boycott of pubs, shops, and other businesses whose owners did not support their cause. The victims of this measure included employers who dismissed or refused to hire Social Democratic workers or who resisted wage demands. But most often the action targeted tavern-owners and hoteliers who refused to make rooms available to Social Democrats for election rallies. Social Democratic boycotts were invoked in Dresden-New City in 1887 after a number of restaurants refused to make their rooms available to August Kaden and Max Kayser: “We hope that those who share our [political] opinions will regard it as beneath their dignity to spend their hard-earned money in such establishments.”<sup>147</sup> This tactic was so successful that some publicans petitioned the government, asking to be excused from the prohibition on renting rooms to socialists. The socialists’ campaign was stepped up in early 1889. Dresden workers formed a special committee to secure meeting rooms for their activity. Eventually the boycotts were extended to pubs that refused to display the socialist *Sächsisches Wochenblatt*. SPD functionaries were posted outside boycotted pubs to monitor their patrons and proselytize among them.

By the end of 1889 Social Democrats had turned the tables on the authorities. The Prussian envoy described their boycotts as a “disciplinary measure” being imposed on the Saxon public. The *Sächsisches Wochenblatt* listed forty-four pubs, restaurants, and retail shops that had been “hit.”<sup>148</sup> As the Reichstag elections of February 1890 approached, Saxon burghers grew restive about this “abnormal situation.”<sup>149</sup> So did Bismarck. He wanted to know whether stiff penalties could be imposed on socialists in Berlin, where boycotts were also breaking out.<sup>150</sup> However, from his ministerial colleagues he received disappointing replies: there was little chance that parliamentarians would support a new law to combat this threat. Saxon authorities were no more successful in devising counter-measures. The district governor in Dresden-Old City reported that one tavern after another was being “conquered.”<sup>151</sup> Meeting rooms were now becoming available to Social Democrats campaigning for municipal, Landtag, and Reichstag elections. The result was “considerable difficulty and worry” in government circles: “people are no longer as confident about the [election] outcome as they were just a short time ago.” Liebknecht had even set up his own “bureau of inquiry” in Leipzig to coordinate the boycott campaign. “In the face of such measures,” one insider remarked, “the authorities are powerless.”<sup>152</sup>

<sup>147</sup> *SWbl*, 30.7.87, cited in Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 154; for some of the following, 154–60, 397–9.

<sup>148</sup> *SWbl*, 6.11.79. <sup>149</sup> Arsenschek, *Kampf*, 321.

<sup>150</sup> Dönhoff, 9/19.11.89 (copies), with clippings; Schwauf, “Bekanntmachung,” 15.11.89; *PrStMin Vota* (1889); all in PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82 No. 1 No. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 155, 397–9.

<sup>152</sup> Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Baron Friedrich von Niethammer, 1.9.89, BHStAM II, MA 2858.

“VALID” — “NOT VALID”

Our opponents act as though nothing incorrect occurred during the election, when in fact the *whole election campaign* consisted through and through of nothing but *election influence* against us . . . This is what one calls a “free, direct election”!?!

—Master weaver Carl Bohne to Wilhelm Liebknecht,  
on the 1881 Reichstag campaign<sup>153</sup>

It’s discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.

—Noël Coward, *Blithe Spirit* (1941)

In February 1883, Saxony’s envoy to Prussia, Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz, reported from Berlin that protests in the Reichstag challenging the election of Saxon deputies had become “epidemic.”<sup>154</sup> Saxony was attracting attention for its role in fostering or undermining fair voting practices.<sup>155</sup> A study published in 1892 confirmed the scale of the problem: of Saxony’s twenty-three Reichstag constituencies, only *four* were not subject to a disputed election between 1871 and 1890.<sup>156</sup> In 1883 things already looked worrisome on two fronts. On the one hand, Nostitz warned that Saxony was now a target of the Reichstag’s Election Oversight Committee.<sup>157</sup> This was a committee of Reichstag deputies charged with the task of gathering and assessing evidence of election abuse. Through 1882 it had been slowly investigating seven elections in Saxony where protests had been launched. (Helmuth von Gerlach once quipped that it should be called the “Committee to Slow Down the Oversight of Elections.”) The spotlight these inquiries threw on Saxony’s implementation of the Anti-Socialist Law was becoming a public embarrassment and a political liability. On the other hand, Nostitz implied that Saxony’s anti-socialist strategy stood at a crossroads. A maze of voting regulations was being applied in new circumstances. Battles against socialism and democracy hinged in part on how those regulations would be interpreted in future elections.

<sup>153</sup> Letter of 3.5.84, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 2:665f. (original emphasis), referring to 17: Glauchau-Meerane.

<sup>154</sup> Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Berlin) to Saxon MdAA Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (copy), 9.2.83, SHStAD, Mdl 5380, with SD, 8.2.83.

<sup>155</sup> Prengel, “Beiträge”; Leser, *Untersuchungen*; *Reichstags-Wahlrecht*, chs. 4–8; Arsenschek, *Kampf*; Anderson, *Democracy*, esp. chs. 2 and 8; Klein, “Wahlprüfungen”; Klein, “Reichstagsgeschichte”; Klein, “Gültig.” Cf. reviews of Arsenschek’s book by Kühne, “Demokratisierung”; Ritter, “Wahlen”; Hartwin Spenkuch, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44 (May 2004) online; Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 259–61.

<sup>156</sup> Prengel, “Beiträge,” 5, 9; cf. Klein, “Wahlprüfungen,” 211.

<sup>157</sup> *Wahlprüfungskommission*; according to Helmut von Gerlach, *Wahlprüfungsverschleppungskommission*.

## DIRTY TRICKS

Although the issue of election fairness came to a head in the years 1882–85, a statement August Bebel made on the floor of the Reichstag in May 1877 reminds us that the issue was layered with ironies both before and after the Anti-Socialist Law was in force. Bebel's remarks concerned a protest launched against the 1877 election of Dr. Julius Pfeiffer, a National Liberal estate owner, in 1: Zittau. Pfeiffer defeated a Progressive candidate, but the election was investigated because coal miners and other workers had been intimidated on a massive scale. Reliable evidence showed that workers had been marched to the polling place by their employers, some of whom pressed ballots for Pfeiffer into their hands. Previously the workers had been asked to sign declarations that they intended to vote for the National Liberal candidate and threatened with dismissal if they did not. The Election Oversight Committee decided not to annul Pfeiffer's election. Among the reasons it cited for its decision was the principle that relations between employers and their workers rested on free choice: employees could remove themselves from any relationship of dependency by leaving their place of employ voluntarily. Reichstag voters were expected to be "independent" men who would not allow "material considerations" to sway their political choice. Bebel told the house that this interpretation "completely undermines the electoral freedom of workers in future elections."<sup>158</sup>

How can we measure the scale of election abuse to which the Saxon envoy and Bebel pointed? Counting helps, but it gets us only so far. The historian Thomas Klein reviewed every election protest launched against a Saxon Reichstag deputy between 1871 and 1918. Thirteen general elections yielded 299 individual constituency contests (excluding run-offs and by-elections). In sixty-one cases an election protest reached the floor of the Reichstag, and in six cases the election was cashiered. The Saxon envoy was correct in noting a new trend beginning in 1881. Across the Reich the number of election protests fell from seventy-four in 1878 to fifty-nine in 1881, but in Saxony it rose from two to seven (and then to nine in 1884). From this it would be easy to infer that authorities in Saxony felt themselves powerless to invoke the full force of the Anti-Socialist Law. By this reading, the sharp increase in the number of protests after the 1881 and 1884 elections showed that it was becoming more difficult to impede the free casting of a ballot. Klein expressed amazement that so *few* protests were launched. However, he went too far when he claimed that the notion of "a 'legal war' of the non-socialist parties against Social Democracy" was nothing but a sham.<sup>159</sup> When the socialists launched election protests Klein sees them engaging in "sniveling and fear-mongering" or "a parlor game where they made all the puppets dance."

The historical evidence supports a different conclusion.<sup>160</sup> So does the historian most familiar with the Election Oversight Committee's activities.<sup>161</sup> Far from seeing

<sup>158</sup> *SBDRA*nI 3/I 1877, A171; *SBDR*, 2.5.77: 985f. (Bebel); Ritter, "Wahlen und Wahlpolitik," 48f.

<sup>159</sup> Klein, "Reichstagsgeschichte," 593–5; Klein, "Wahlprüfungen," 217.

<sup>160</sup> See inter alia Saxony's military plenipotentiary von der Planitz (Berlin) to Saxon FO, 6.12.81, SHStAD, MdAA 1405.

<sup>161</sup> Arsenschek, *Kampf*.

the Committee as an essential link in the chain pulling Germans forward toward free and open elections, Robert Arsenschek has emphasized its many compromises and failures. It tried hard to be vigilant in the 1880s. But gradually all parties (except the Social Democrats) lost interest in the vigorous pursuit of election protests. After 1900 they did not exploit opportunities to expand the prerogatives of the Committee or the Reichstag. By the elections of 1907 and 1912 the Committee regularly validated elections that it would have cashiered in the 1880s.

Election oversight always combined idealism and partisanship in an uneasy relationship. The Saxon case illustrates this well. A red thread running through the sixteen protests launched against Saxon Reichstag elections in 1881 and 1884 shows parliamentarians and Saxon authorities trying to reconcile the Anti-Socialist Law not only with the Reichstag voting law but with Saxony's own laws—specifically the Saxon Criminal Code and the Saxon Association Law. What were the meatiest bones of contention? They included the denial of assembly halls and other meeting places to socialists; the banning or dissolution of SPD election rallies; the confiscation of election brochures, flyers, posters, and printed ballots;<sup>162</sup> the arrest of persons distributing these printed materials; the expulsion or imprisonment of socialists under the Lesser State of Siege or the Saxon Domicile Law; manipulation of voters lists, most notably excluding recipients of public welfare; the intimidation of workers by their employers, whether industrialists or estate owners; and the inadmissible “official” campaign roles played by local authorities, including district governors and members of municipal or rural councils.<sup>163</sup>

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” That was *not* the premise on which the Election Oversight Committee operated. But we should not assume the obverse. Social Democrats’ indignation over the electoral chicanery that enveloped them did not always ignite an official protest. Even when the government or the non-socialist parties engaged in massive influence-peddling, no complaint would be filed if a socialist won the seat. As the later SPD chairman and member of the Election Oversight Committee Paul Singer once put it, the best protest of all was decided on election night itself—with a socialist victory. Moreover, many socialist complaints were dismissed out of hand by the Reichstag or turned down by the Committee because they were not well enough documented. Here communal officials, district and regional governors, the police, newspaper editors, and functionaries in the non-socialist parties had the upper hand: they possessed the education and training, the time and opportunity, to provide (or manufacture) the paper trail needed to disavow election abuse. The socialists only slowly learned that they had to muster overwhelming evidence of official wrong-doing if their protests had any chance of success.

To have an election overturned required socialists (and everyone else) to overcome a series of hurdles, each higher than the last. The process began with a complaint to local authorities in order to establish specific wrong-doing by specific individuals at a specific time and place. A petition usually followed, addressed to the

<sup>162</sup> SHStAD, MdI 11017–18; Stern, *Kampf*, esp. 1:377ff., 2:587–642.

<sup>163</sup> See e.g. Dönhoff, 20.3.88, PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82, No. 1, Bd. 4.

Reichstag but perhaps also to a city council or a minister of the interior. If so inclined, Reichstag members could vote to “impeach” (*beanstanden*) an election, which really meant they were willing to investigate it. That is when the Election Oversight Committee set to work. Through state-level authorities such as the Saxon ministry of the interior, it instructed local officials to investigate alleged abuses and convey the relevant documents to Berlin for its own deliberations. Finally it delivered its recommendation and waited for the Reichstag majority to accept or reject it. Besides recommending that an election be declared valid or invalid, the Committee could demand that an offending official be issued a reprimand. In many cases the final stage of this arduous process became pointless. Perhaps the elected deputy had died in the meantime; perhaps he had resigned his seat (especially when he anticipated an embarrassing outcome); perhaps there was no time to hold a by-election before the next general election. Until a final verdict was rendered, the holder of the contested seat was free to cast his vote in the chamber. As it happened, most protests arising from the general election of 27 October 1881 were decided in 1883 or mid-1884—with the next general election scheduled for October 1884.

Did socialists, too, resort to fabrication and exaggeration? They did, unabashedly. This practice forced even sympathetic members of the Election Oversight Committee to be judiciously skeptical. But the Committee never gained access to confidential documents—decrees, memoranda, and situation reports circulated among local officials, police, ministers of state, and foreign envoys—that reveal how systematically Saxon authorities attempted to silence Social Democrats during election campaigns. These documents confirm that anti-socialist repression was widespread and that lower civil servants and gendarmes did not need explicit instructions from Dresden to initiate it. Those local officials established a routine during election campaigns that developed its own dynamic. Reacting to public indignation and prodding from Berlin, Saxon ministers tried to rein in or reprimand overzealous officials; but their efforts were aimed squarely at avoiding detection and public revelations, not accepting socialists as legitimate players in the election game.<sup>164</sup>

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Pressure on the Saxon government to play by the rules had intensified in the winter of 1881. Bebel and Liebknecht used the forum of the Saxon Landtag to protest against the repression they suffered during the July 1879 Landtag campaign and then under the Lesser State of Siege. In those protests the “Chemnitz rope affair” figured prominently. Trying to defend his government’s actions, Interior Minister Nostitz-Wallwitz declared baldly that nothing in the Reichstag voting law prevented Saxon authorities from banning socialist meetings outright during election campaigns.<sup>165</sup> The seven protests raised in the wake of the October 1881 Reichstag

<sup>164</sup> SHStAD, KHMSD 1061; Arsenschek, *Kampf*, 180f.; BAP, RAdI 14450; SHStAD, Mdl 5380–1, for the following.

<sup>165</sup> Strachey, 10.11.81, PRO, FO 68/165; Dönhoff, 14/26.2.82, PAAAB, Sachsen 48 Bd. 7.

elections raised the stakes further and brought new abuses to light. Even for one election where no protest was launched—the defeat in 5: Dresden-Old City<sup>166</sup>—Bebel's speeches in the Landtag lifted the veil on Saxon abuses of authority and the mindset of officials who perpetrated them. (As Glauchau's district governor wrote in October 1881, "it is impossible to use kid gloves to unleash a law that is exceptional in its nature and aims.")<sup>167</sup> Bebel's petition to the Reichstag about expulsions under the Lesser State of Siege reached a far wider audience.<sup>168</sup> Once the Election Oversight Committee was involved, public calls to redress Saxony's idiosyncratic interpretation of Reichstag voting regulations elicited a national echo.<sup>169</sup>

Consider the Election Oversight Committee's response to the protest launched against the election of the National Liberal estate- and factory-owner Ludwig Leuschner in 17: Glauchau-Meerane.<sup>170</sup> This was the protest that had the greatest repercussions for Saxony. It focused attention on all the dirty tricks the government used to hamstring the supporters of Leuschner's opponent, Ignaz Auer.<sup>171</sup> In the village of Hohenstein, the socialists reported that the "hunt for our electoral flyers" included calling out of the local fire department. One of them remembered "with outrage" how Auer brought with him "a whole commando of police and security forces" wherever he went: this "baggage train followed us through the streets and out of one tavern and into the next. Oi!"<sup>172</sup> Friedrich Leuschner's election was finally declared invalid on 24 June 1884.

More significant was the Committee's decision in February 1883 that officials could not ban socialist election meetings simply because a speaker was likely to make remarks—as §1 of the Anti-Socialist Law had it—dangerous to public peace and harmony among classes. This interpretation struck the Saxon envoy in Berlin as so "dubious" that he visited Prussian Interior Minister Puttkamer to seek clarification. Puttkamer replied that he could find no reason to challenge the Committee's interpretation of the law. Undaunted, Oswald von Nostitz rose in the Reichstag on 13 February 1883 to defend Saxony's current practice and to denounce the Committee's ruling. He also objected to the Committee's declaration that executive members of local councils were not permitted "to unite for electoral purposes and work on behalf of particular elections." In the end the Reichstag accepted the Committee's recommendation that "the registration of an election meeting by the Social Democrats . . . *in and of itself*, even in connection with the announcement that a Social Democratic speaker will appear at the meeting, cannot be regarded as something that justifies the assumption . . . that the election meeting will necessarily

<sup>166</sup> Klein, "Gültig," 238.

<sup>167</sup> AHMS Glauchau to Saxon MdI, 29.10.81, cited in Arsenschek, *Kampf*, 308.

<sup>168</sup> Bebel, *Petition*, including the Saxon LT debate of 21.2.82.

<sup>169</sup> See Rudhart, 13.1.84, BHStAM II, MA 2853; Dönhoff, 16.1.84, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Vol. 10; cf. BARuS, 2:190–203; *SBDR*, 20.3.84: 146–52 (Bebel), 152–8 (Puttkamer).

<sup>170</sup> *SBDRAnl* 5/II 1882/83, A154; 5/IV 1884, A134; *SBDR* (13.2.83), 1457–66; (24.6.84), 1003–1018.

<sup>171</sup> The SPD had won this riding handily for years; in 1881 Leuschner defeated Auer by 7,375 to 6,692 votes.

<sup>172</sup> Letter of 3.5.84, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel*, 2:665f. (original emphasis).

further the aims outlined in §1 etc.”<sup>173</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht later declared that the Reichstag law confirming the Committee’s interpretation was “perhaps the best one the Reichstag had passed since it was created”—it was the “first manly attempt to combat the excesses of governments and police.”<sup>174</sup>

What kinds of election abuse were considered morally unfair but legally acceptable by the Election Oversight Committee? Some answers are provided by the Committee’s decision to uphold the 1884 election of the Conservative Gustav Ackermann in 6: Dresden-County.<sup>175</sup>

Ackermann had defeated the socialist Georg Horn by a wide margin, 9,099 votes to 6,214. This one-sided outcome did not prevent Horn and his supporters from submitting a lengthy list of objections, which Ackermann’s supporters countered with a petition of their own a few weeks later. The socialists objected that four of their supporters were arrested on 29 September for distributing an election flyer supporting Horn’s candidacy.<sup>176</sup> Awakened from their sleep by a gendarme, these socialists were transported to the local courthouse; after appearing before a judge they were forbidden from distributing the remaining copies of the flyer (which in any case were seized on 2 October). The Committee discounted this objection on the grounds that no protest had been submitted to local authorities in timely fashion. Because four weeks remained before election day, “the seizure of the election flyer had had no influence on the campaign.” Some members of the Committee observed that a Saxon gendarme had no authority to confiscate printed matter in this way; but the Saxon government representative who sat in on the Committee’s deliberations persuaded them that, in Saxony, the gendarmerie was an “associated organ” of the public prosecutor’s office.

The mayor of Dippoldiswalde had warned a local publican that if he did not deny meeting rooms to the socialists his business would suffer. To counter this objection the Conservatives secured a declaration from the publican in question, denying that any such threat had been issued. The Committee decided that Social Democratic agitation had not been curtailed unfairly: “it could not be determined whether this room was the only room in the town in which a meeting could have been held.” Moreover, even if the mayor of Dippoldiswalde had issued the alleged threat, he could not be considered to have done so in an official capacity: “It is extraordinarily difficult,” the Committee decided, “to determine to what degree such conversations, which have not been conducted in an official capacity, may result in influencing the election outcome.” The same mayor was accused of instructing his night-watchmen to distribute printed ballots for the Conservative candidate. Here too the Committee decided that those night-watchmen could not be considered representatives of the state because they were not formally

<sup>173</sup> *SBDR*, 13.2.83: 1460, 1463 (Nostitz-Wallwitz), 1463ff. (Richter); *SBDRAnl* 5/II 1882/83, A154: 520.

<sup>174</sup> *SBDR*, 13.1.86: 502, cited in Arsenschek, *Kampf*, 310.

<sup>175</sup> *SBDR Anl* 6/1 1884/85, A173; *SBDR* 3.3.85: 1520–2; copy of the original protest in SHStAD, Mdl 5381.

<sup>176</sup> Flyer in SHStAD, Mdl 5381.

subordinate to municipal authorities. "A night-watchman...[has] other civic duties that cannot be construed as belonging to the civil service."

The Committee took more seriously the claim that printed ballots for Ackermann had been laid out on tables in the polling place itself: if this claim were true, a reprimand would be in order. However, the Committee could not say how many of these ballots had actually been cast, so it dismissed this complaint. It was also troubled by the claim that in certain precincts one representative of the state had filled two incompatible roles: election officer and official observer. The Saxon government's representative successfully defended this practice with another exercise in semantics. Perhaps the Committee wanted to expose such sophistry: it decided that it could have declared the whole election invalid if these civil servants' double role were proven. However, it conceded that it could just as well have sought further clarification instead. In the end it laid no weight on this matter at all.

Such judgments are useful reminders that although socialists had more room to maneuver in 1884 than in 1881, the struggle against Social Democracy continued unabated. Evidence from other protests launched after the 1884 Reichstag campaign points to the same conclusion. Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz and his successor continued to work behind the scenes in Berlin to get disputed Conservative elections declared valid in 1885 and 1886. Yet the enemies of socialism complained that the Saxon government was not doing enough to combat Social Democracy. One Conservative leader expressed amazement that the Saxon government in general, and Interior Minister Nostitz in particular, had become "too conscientious" in trying to appear non-partisan. They "fearfully" avoided "any sort of election influence." They forgot "that the government is also a party." And they neglected their duty to encourage the state-supporting parties in their struggle against the opposition.<sup>177</sup>

Conservatives were not the only grumblers. A contributor to the National Liberal *Leipziger Tageblatt* complained that not a single socialist meeting had been banned by the government during a by-election campaign and that local mayors were protecting socialist rallies against disturbances from other parties. War Minister Fabrice complained vigorously that Nostitz was too willing to dispense with the weapon of government influence during the 1884 election campaign.<sup>178</sup> Even King Albert and foreign diplomats waded into the discussion. The king objected when his "socialist expert" told him that Social Democracy was on the wane, and envoys scratched their head as to why Leipzig authorities did not use other provisions of the Lesser State of Sieges besides the expulsion clause (§28). That clause was even relaxed for Bebel, who was allowed to return to Leipzig from time to time. Nostitz perplexed his interlocutors when he reverted to his previous generosity of spirit toward Bebel: "The great orator's door-handles are nearly as excellent as his speeches," Nostitz remarked, and it was not fair "to prevent Bebel

<sup>177</sup> Citing complaints from the Saxon Cons. leader Friesen-Rötha: Dönhoff, 13.3.86, 12.10.87, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, vol. 1. Cf. Strachey, 25.10.84, PRO, FO 68/168.

<sup>178</sup> For the following, Rudhart, 24.7.84, 25.10.84, BHStAM II, MA 2853; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Gabriel von Herbert-Rathkeal, 27.9.84, HHStAV, PAV/43.



from...looking after his interests in that department.”<sup>179</sup> Nor was Nostitz impressed by show trials like the one Justice Minister Abeken orchestrated in Chemnitz in 1885: too often they resulted in acquittals or other public relations disasters.<sup>180</sup> Nostitz even confessed to a certain nostalgia for the “much more interesting” Landtag debates of the 1870s, before the small but noisy socialist faction had entered the lower house.<sup>181</sup>

Although Saxon state ministers and leaders of the right-wing parties rallied around the more resolute anti-socialist policy pressed by Puttkamer and Bismarck after 1886,<sup>182</sup> two years later the example of a young Kaiser willing to meddle in Prussian Landtag elections caused misgivings. Saxon newspapers doubted whether it was desirable “for a monarch to adopt the style of an electioneering agent.” They started to draw comparisons between the peripatetic young Wilhelm II and King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, who “used to travel about hectoring, or complimenting, the local authorities on the results of the elections.”

#### ASSAULTS ON PARLIAMENTARISM

There are many ties that connect Bismarck’s efforts to find a workable parliamentary majority in the Reichstag, his attempts to define Social Democracy as beyond the pale, and his proposals to overcome the “limitations” of the Reichstag voting law of 1869. Bismarck could not come to grips with the idea that a Reichstag in which more and more Social Democrats sat provided an accurate reflection of the German electorate.<sup>183</sup> Hence the idea of replacing universal male suffrage or bolstering it with new safeguards was never far from his thoughts during the 1880s.

Bismarck and Saxony’s state ministers almost certainly saw eye to eye about one provision of the draft Anti-Socialist Law which Bismarck desperately wanted in August 1878 but did not get. “If the law is to be effective,” he wrote then, “I do not believe it possible in the long run to allow citizens who are legally proven to be socialists to retain the right to vote, to stand for election, or to enjoy the privilege of sitting as a member of the Reichstag.”<sup>184</sup> Bismarck fumed when a draft bill lacking these provisions was leaked prematurely. He knew that once a “mild” version of the Anti-Socialist Law become public the Reichstag could hardly be expected to pass a harsher bill entirely excluding Social Democrats from Germany’s electoral culture. Even after it was clear that Social Democrats would still be allowed to stand for election, Bismarck wanted to ban publication of their speeches in the Reichstag. He also tried, and failed, to include a provision whereby any civil servant who participated in socialist activity could be dismissed, with no right to a pension.

<sup>179</sup> Strachey, 7.5.84, PRO, FO 68/168.

<sup>180</sup> Strachey, 3/16.10.85, PRO, FO 68/169; Rudhart, 8.10.85, BHStAM II, MA 2854; Dönhoff, 22.11.88, PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, No. 1, Bd. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Rudhart, 17.3.86, BHStAM II, MA 2855. Cf. acting Austrian envoy to Saxony, Dr. Ludwig Vélics von Lászlofalva, 13.10.89, HHStAV, PAV/45.

<sup>182</sup> See Strachey, 27.4.88, PRO, FO 68/173. For the following, Strachey, 23.11.88, *ibid*.

<sup>183</sup> Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 3:22.

<sup>184</sup> Bismarck to Christoph von Tiedemann (copy), 15.8.78, BAP, RKA 1292/2.

This was not just pettiness or penny-pinching on Bismarck's part. It reflected his idiosyncratic view of how elections should be used to judge loyalty to the state. This view emerged when Bismarck wrote to the Prussian war minister in September 1878 to suggest that Berlin's garrison urgently needed augmentation:

The elections [of 30 July 1878] have shown that there are over 50,000 Social Democrats in Berlin aged 25 or older, and certainly over 80,000 if one adds those who do not appear on the voters rolls but who are particularly active in uprisings. The news reports about the election campaign also show that the adherents of Social Democracy are very numerous everywhere and, in places, dominant among the class of lower civil servants, namely in the railway, postal, and telegraph services, even among the police and constabulary. One must therefore anticipate with some certainty that these branches of the civil service will fail to do their duty if unrest should erupt.<sup>185</sup>

With one scheme after another to fortify the state against the onslaughts he expected—from the streets and from the floor of the Reichstag—Bismarck was unrelenting. “I consider the [Anti-Socialist] Law just a first step,” he told his conservative friend Robert Lucius, “which must be followed by others.”<sup>186</sup> In early 1879, with support from Saxony,<sup>187</sup> Bismarck did his best to intimidate the Reichstag to imprison two Social Democrats, Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche and Wilhelm Hasselmann, who claimed that their parliamentary immunity (§31 of the Reich Constitution) took precedence over their expulsion from Berlin under the Lesser State of Siege. In March Bismarck tried to push through a “muzzle law,” which would have given Reichstag deputies the right to censure any member who “abused” the privilege of the podium to express radical views. This bill's provisions also included the right to excise the speeches of opposition deputies from the parliamentary record and to ban their publication in newspapers.<sup>188</sup> On both counts Bismarck failed to achieve his objective.

The next card Bismarck played won the applause of Saxony's ministers and many parliamentarians in its Landtag. Again he blurred any line between the “objective” administration of the law and partisan political advantage. Bismarck proposed a constitutional amendment to introduce biennial budgets. Under this proposal Reichstag elections would be held every four years, rather than every three. Bismarck, Nostitz, and others claimed that this amendment would reduce two “unbearable,” “unceasing” headaches: drawing up and legislating state budgets annually, and having the Reichstag and state Landtage sit concurrently. Under this plan, it was anticipated that the Reichstag and individual Landtage would hold their sessions in alternate years. But for those who disliked general elections on principle, it also held the prospect of extending the legislative term for the Reichstag from three to four years. In early discussions of this bill, the Prussian minister of

<sup>185</sup> Bismarck to Prussian Minister of War Georg von Kameke, 3.9.78, BWiA, 6:193f.

<sup>186</sup> Lucius, *Bismarck-Erinnerungen*, 143; cf. Geffcken, *Juni*, 31f.

<sup>187</sup> Oswald von Nostitz (Berlin) to MdAA Hermann von Nostitz (Dresden), 8.2.78, SHStAD, MdAA 1405. On Saxon uncertainty, Dönhoff, 6.7.82, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 6.

<sup>188</sup> *SBDRAnt* 4/II 1879, A15. Ministerial *Vota* and other materials in BAP, Rkz 1784.

justice proposed holding national elections every *eight* years. Bismarck had no objections to this “in principle” but deemed it “more expedient” for Germans to go to the polls every four years to conform to the logical rhythm of biennial budgets.<sup>189</sup> Bismarck was not surprised when the Reichstag quietly buried this proposal. Nevertheless, Nostitz in Dresden had already expressed his enthusiasm for less frequent Saxon Landtag elections. He devoted some energy to generating support in this direction among non-socialist Landtag deputies. His rationale? “The land would not be given up to election campaigns excited by party passions as often as it is now.”<sup>190</sup>

Around the time of the Reichstag elections of October 1881 Bismarck began dropping other hints that universal manhood suffrage was being “ruined” because Germans “did not know how to handle it.” Bismarck remarked to his amanuensis Moritz Busch that the “gullibility of the voters” demonstrated “the weakness of our institutions.” The present constitutional arrangement had “not stood the test,” and the German princes would have to consider whether parliament in its present form was “still compatible with the welfare of the Reich.”<sup>191</sup> Statements like these contributed to the willingness of the Kartell parties after 1887 to take the initiative and propose extending the period between Reichstag elections from three to five years. The Federal Council gave its stamp of approval to this reform in February 1888. Then complications arose. The Anti-Socialist Law was up for renewal at the same time (Puttkamer was pushing for a five-year extension this time). The Prussian Landtag was also to have its legislative periods extended to five years. And Wilhelm I’s death in March 1888 brought to the throne Kaiser Friedrich III, who was terminally ill but reluctant to endorse a diminution of parliament’s powers. Pressure bordering on intimidation by Bismarck was required before Friedrich finally signed both bills.<sup>192</sup>

Among the intriguing ideas never realized in the 1880s was Bismarck’s brief consideration of a form of proportional representation. After seeing the opposition win so many seats in 1881, Bismarck remarked to one of his country neighbors that Germany’s “fundamentally false” electoral system was incompatible with a “well-ordered state.” “Every vote should count,” he declared, whereas now, when the parties faced each other with almost equal strength, “the other half of the votes count for almost nothing.” His idea was that all of Germany should vote on the same day for their preferred party; these votes would then be tabulated and allocated to the principal parties—25,000 votes to elect one deputy. According to this neighbor Bismarck argued that this system would reduce parochialism, the role of personality, and the “disagreeable,” “disruptive” role of run-off elections and by-elections.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>189</sup> PrStMin meeting of 4.4.79 cited in Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 2:520.

<sup>190</sup> Dönhoff, 9.3.79, 22.12.79, 18.2.80, 10.3.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bde. 1–3.

<sup>191</sup> Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, 3:57f. (16.11.81).

<sup>192</sup> BGuE, 493f.; Augst, *Stellung*, 168f.; Pflanze, *Bismarck*, 3:281f., 286.

<sup>193</sup> Augst, *Stellung*, 163–6.

That Bismarck never pursued this idea suggests that his remarks were prompted by spleen, not calculation. Proportional representation along these lines would have greatly increased the influence of party chairmen and executives and destroyed the personal relationship between the individual parliamentarian and his constituents—thus accelerating the transition from the politics of notables to mass politics. One historian has done the arithmetic and concluded that Bismarck's plan would not have yielded the expected result, let alone the desired one. Only by assigning 12,841 votes per deputy would the Reichstag continue to hold 397 deputies; Bismarck's scheme would have sent only 203 deputies to Berlin. The Social Democrats would have won exactly the same number of seats (twelve) under Bismarck's system of proportional representation as they actually did in 1881. And the Conservatives would have been weakened, winning only forty-seven seats compared to their actual seventy-seven. Nevertheless, the files of the Reich chancellery and the Reich office of the interior are filled with other speculative forays into the realm of electoral reform. Individuals who hoped to wring more conservative victories were anything but shy in proposing ways to overcome the liabilities and limitations of Germany's election law.<sup>194</sup> In an era of increasing scrutiny by the Election Oversight Committee, should we be surprised that some of these proposals came from Saxon Reichstag deputies whose elections had been challenged in the mid-1880s?<sup>195</sup>

Illustrative of this willingness to rethink the premises of the Reichstag suffrage was a proposal that Robert Mühlmann, chairman of the Conservative Association in Riesa, sent to Bismarck three weeks after the 1884 Reichstag election.<sup>196</sup> Mühlmann begged Bismarck to eliminate the entire system of run-off elections, which he called a "debasing of the holy rights of the German voter." Mühlmann was referring to the "fiasco" that had led to a Progressive victory over a Conservative in a by-election in 7: Meissen in May 1882.<sup>197</sup> "If the system of run-off elections is not abolished, the political existence of our country will die as a consequence. The personification of dishonorableness will be drummed into our body politic, so that the concept of 'honor' itself . . . will appear to have been completely abandoned."

The early 1880s were also marked by brinkmanship. Bismarck intimidated Center Party and Progressive deputies every two years to impel them to renew the Anti-Socialist Law. "If need be, we may let the Anti-Socialist Law lapse and thereby cure the liberal bourgeoisie of its progressive inclinations through fear of Social Democracy." On the eve of the 1884 election Bismarck again prepared for the worst. "If the election results are excessively oppositional, the parliamentary system will be ruined that much faster and the way prepared for saber rule."<sup>198</sup> The Reichstag session of 1885–86 was no less tense: both the Anti-Socialist Law and the army *Septennat* were up for renewal. Still Bismarck was full of fire, expecting

<sup>194</sup> See petitions, brochures, and other proposals for electoral reform (1877–91) in BAP, RADl 14693.

<sup>195</sup> E.g. Arthur Gehlert (20: Marienberg), *Nach den Reichstagswahlen* (Leipzig, 1890), BAP, RADl 14693; *SBDRAnl* 6/I 1884/85, A247.

<sup>196</sup> Mühlmann to Bismarck, 20.11.84, BAP, Rkz 1813.

<sup>197</sup> For the following, Dönhoff, 18/26.5.82, 12/21.6.82; PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Lucius, *Bismarck-Erinnerungen*, 280 (10.1.84), 304 (27.10.84).

“dissolutions, elections, possibly a coup d’état.” Once again he freely expressed doubts about whether self-important Reichstag deputies and those who applied the Anti-Socialist Law with too much generosity could be tolerated. “The German rulers may finally discover that it has been an illusion to try to rule Germany with parliament. The Reichstag is more easily dispensable than the army.” Around this time Württemberg’s minister president concluded that if Bismarck seriously feared for the survival of the monarchy, “he would light the fuse under the powder keg, in cold blood.”<sup>199</sup>

Conservatives in Saxony were equally convinced that Bismarck meant business. During the election campaign of 1887 they took seriously hints that defeat of the Army Bill would spell the end of universal manhood suffrage: Bismarck would “take away that bauble” he gave Germany in 1867. “I spoke to many Conservatives on the subject,” reported the British envoy Strachey, “and the reply in every case was—‘There will be a *Charte Octroyée*, and a Reichstag will be elected which will pass the Army Bills, and Bismarck’s other favorite measures.’ Their belief was universal that the Reich chancellor would be troubled by no doubts or scruples.” Saxon liberals saw no such immediate danger; but Strachey predicted that they would surrender their principles immediately if a showdown should materialize: “if the existing institutions were subverted, hardly a word would be uttered, and not a shot fired, in their defence.”<sup>200</sup>

Like the socialists, Bismarck never “let loose.” The success of the Kartell parties in the Reichstag elections of 1887 robbed him of the claim that drastic action against the “democratic” Reichstag was needed—until a new crisis arose in 1890. Long after he had left office, Bismarck reiterated his view that Social Democracy was a criminal conspiracy and a military threat. Socialism had armed itself “to cut the throat of the state and of bourgeois society.”<sup>201</sup>

Social Democracy wants revolution . . . Whoever wants a well-ordered state must fight Social Democracy. As dike reeve I had to operate according to the principle: he who doesn’t want to help hold back the flood has to give way . . . To deal with Social Democracy . . . one must take away its political rights, *the suffrage*. I would have gone that far. *The Social Democratic question is a military one.*<sup>202</sup>

## TAKING STOCK

Conventional wisdom about how German Social Democracy survived twelve years of repression after 1878 highlights the importance of Bebel, Liebknecht, and the party’s Reichstag caucus in providing a voice for the movement. Yet one can hardly overemphasize the importance of a related development: the emergence of a seamless socialist organization at the grass-roots level. Elections were the *raison d’être* of this organization—from the nomination of candidates to the coverage of entire districts with printed ballots and flyers; from the local recruitment of activists

<sup>199</sup> Hermann von Mittnacht, 9.12.85, in BWiA 7:339–41.

<sup>200</sup> Strachey, 28.1.87, PRO, FO 68/171.

<sup>201</sup> Cited (n.d.) in Augst, *Stellung*, 130.

<sup>202</sup> Bismarck (autumn 1892), cited *ibid.*, 129f. (emphasis added).

and the preparation of meetings to their integration into supra-local party networks (and even, in some cases, alliances with groups outside the party). To fight election battles, working-class functionaries had to embrace a new way of thinking. They had to break out of their narrow, familiar communities (for example, when they sat only with members of their own class around the *Stammtisch*). And they had to establish connections with other occupational groups and people living in other parts of the constituency. Thus election campaigns and Social Democracy's organizational imperative contributed to the fundamental politicization of German society.<sup>203</sup>

We have seen the breadth and intensity of discrimination unleashed against socialists by authorities at all tiers of government and by all other political parties. We have also seen that differences of opinion ran between and through these groups as they realized that the war on socialism might never be won. Germany's federal structure conditioned every facet of anti-socialist repression as it unfolded, gradually and with false starts, during the 1880s. August Bebel recognized that it was the socialists' opponents who defined the rules of engagement:

Our behavior will not change the behavior of our opponents one whit. To achieve even modest success we would have to swear off and deny our activity altogether, destroy our [press] organ, and emasculate our speeches in the Reichstag and Landtag . . . And if we did all that, they would demand still more of us; in the end they would not believe us anyway, declaring instead that everything we do is merely calculated hypocrisy and duplicity, and that now everyone must really be on their guard . . . The only thing that we can and must do is avoid unnecessary provocation and keep our nerve, though that is damned difficult in the face of the swinishness that is constantly unleashed against us . . . *Thus our tactics . . . are determined much more by our enemies than we can prescribe them ourselves.*<sup>204</sup>

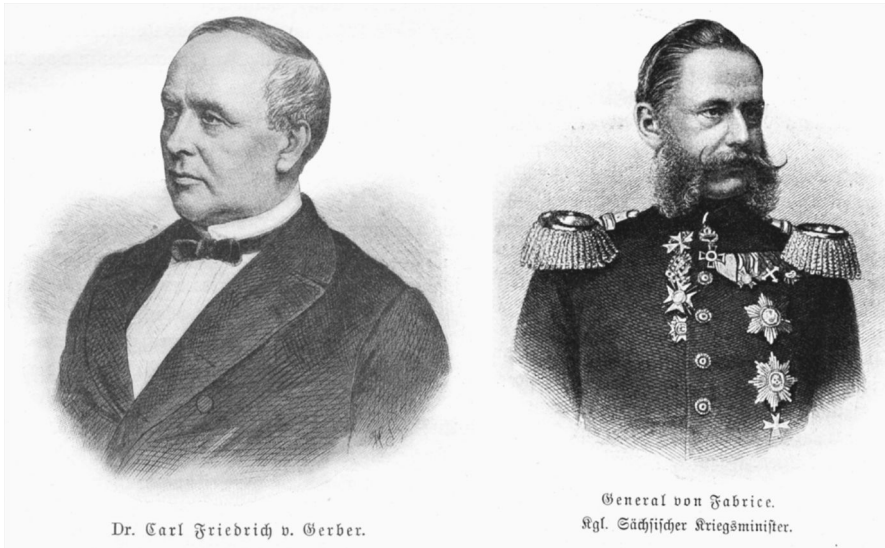
The sense of outrage conveyed by Bebel's words provides a salutary reminder that we must try to understand what contemporaries *thought* the Anti-Socialist Law accomplished. To conclude this chapter let us consider reflections offered by three of Saxony's leading political figures in the 1880s.

Saxon Minister of Culture Carl von Gerber (Figure 4.2) was eager to unburden his thoughts to Prussian envoy Dönhoff in October 1880. The Anti-Socialist Law had so exceeded Gerber's expectations that he hoped it would become permanent. But when Gerber described the threat represented by Social Democracy, he echoed none of Bismarck's rhetoric about its criminal, international, and military aspects. His thoughts went in quite another direction.

He [Gerber] sees socialism as a typhus, where the physician must first be concerned to relieve the fever . . . The contagious matter, the socialist movement, is present in the people; but the fever is really the agitators, and the efforts of the government must be directed towards making the latter harmless; then the healthy body of the people will

<sup>203</sup> See Schröder, "Wahlkämpfe," 59.

<sup>204</sup> Bebel to Auer, 4.1.82, BAmL, 798f. (emphasis added).



**Figure 4.2.** Saxon Minister of Culture Carl von Gerber and Saxon Minister of War Alfred von Fabrice.

Source: Konrad Sturmhoefel, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Albertinischen Sachsen. Von 1815 bis 1904* (Leipzig, n.d.), 534 (Gerber), 441 (Fabrice).

shake off the contagion on its own. This has been achieved through the [Anti-Socialist] Law: it combats and suppresses public agitation and—as far as possible—clandestine agitation too . . . As soon as the provisions of the law have actually reached the agitational fever, it has subsided, and the people themselves have been able to repel any unhealthy effects that remain . . . Heartening evidence is growing that . . . calm and relief have returned among the population and signs of moral improvement are increasing. Already many of those who left the Protestant Church are returning to it.<sup>205</sup>

A second assessment was provided by Saxon War Minister Alfred von Fabrice (Figure 4.2) on the eve of the 1890 Reichstag elections. He had been asked whether he thought the Anti-Socialist Law would be renewed for a fifth time and, if so, to what end? Fabrice conceded that many Saxons disliked the political premise of the law: its renewal on the eve of a general election was unwelcome even to those who approved of its provisions. The Conservatives felt themselves unable to gauge public opinion at the grass roots, and wanted to proceed carefully. Therefore Fabrice speculated that the legislation to renew the law might be buried in committee until after the elections, when he expected it would pass. Next Fabrice was asked whether the Reich government and the Federal Council had public opinion on their side in “treating the socialists as a proscribed class.” He replied that “they had”—the “wish for permanent coercion was pretty general.” The “weak point of the system,”

<sup>205</sup> Reported in Dönhoff, 14.10.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 4.

however, was the expulsion clause.<sup>206</sup> According to Fabrice, “it was a strong thing to drive from his domicile a man who had not been convicted of an actual offence, and there were many who thought the practice indefensible.”<sup>207</sup>

Our third witness is Saxon Justice Minister Christian von Abeken—Saxony’s “Torquemada.”<sup>208</sup> He believed the Anti-Socialist Law had been effective, initially. There had been no alternative to its implementation. However, over time it was not able to reverse the tide of the socialist movement, let alone destroy it. What might follow? Abeken believed that Germany was “in urgent need of a stronger defense than the present Anti-Socialist Law offers.” The masses were willing to follow “relatively untalented leaders” who duped them with promises of improving their lot in life. Therefore the leaders needed to be “rendered harmless,” ideally through much stronger provisions in the Reich Criminal Code. If the leaders could be imprisoned repeatedly and for longer periods, and if they could be denied the right to sit in the Reichstag, then it might be possible to bring enlightenment to the “leaderless masses.” This course, Abeken felt, was preferable to a law that was ineffective and that prompted uncomfortable public debate each time it was renewed. When he was asked whether he really expected the Reichstag to pass such a revision to the Criminal Code, Abeken replied that only a Reichstag in which the Conservatives enjoyed a majority could do so. However, even the successful revision of the Criminal Code would not solve the problem of Social Democracy. “Hand in hand” with that revision must come a reorganization of the German judiciary. Abeken believed that German judges enjoyed too much independence and freedom in handing down judgments according to their own lights: too often they “limited their judgments as far as possible to the letter of the law.” Prospective judges had to be selected more carefully in future. German prosecutors, too, needed to give more thought to the broader context in which prosecutions could and should be pressed.

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These appraisals of the Anti-Socialist Law converge and diverge in ways that will be examined further in this book. They also suggest why German policy seemed rudderless in the winter of 1889/90. Suddenly the “parties of order” faced electoral challenges they could barely have envisioned in the 1870s. With the Reichstag elections of February 1890, German political culture experienced a seismic shift—the second in twelve years. Nevertheless, the battle cry “Against Revolution!” was not the only one that mobilized voters in the 1870s and 1880s. We must also consider calls to arms that identified liberals and Jews as the greatest threat facing Germany.

<sup>206</sup> That is, §28, by which the Lesser State of Siege could be imposed locally.

<sup>207</sup> Reported in Strachey, 8.11.89, PRO, FO 68/174.

<sup>208</sup> As described by August Bebel, cited in ch. 3. The following observations from Abeken were reported in Dönhoff, 7/16.1.90, PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82, No. 1, No. 1, Geheim, Bd. 2.



## 5

### Against Liberalism and the Jews

“There are two words that cannot be uttered without causing a Saxon to become greatly agitated: Jesuit and Jew.”<sup>1</sup> So claimed Friedrich von Beust, Saxony’s government leader from 1849 to 1866. Jews provided an adversarial image against which Saxon Conservatives defined their party and program. But did that image condition the development of Saxon Conservatism to the same degree that characterizations of “unreliable” liberals and “threatening” socialists served to mobilize Conservative supporters? In Saxony the answer seems to be yes. The fate of German Jews was inextricably linked to the fate of German liberalism. More belatedly, Jews were associated with the threat of socialism. The Saxon case reveals how regional struggles for power were shaped not only by the advance of a mass movement like Social Democracy but also by the success of right-wing elites to rally new recruits, and voters, by conflating the socialist, liberal, and Jewish “threats.”

This chapter begins by documenting the relative weakness of left liberalism and National Liberalism from the mid-1870s to 1890. Here the “what” questions are easier to answer than “why” ones. *Why* Saxon liberals proved willing to fall into line behind Conservative generals remains difficult to answer. We can show that businessmen, commercial traders, factory owners, and higher civil servants saw the Saxon Conservative Party as their legitimate representatives in parliament. It is also clear that Saxon Conservatism was less aristocratic and more bourgeois, less rural and more urban, less agrarian and more industrial than other regional wings of the party. The question of why Saxon liberals willingly subordinated themselves to Conservative leadership nonetheless remains a vexing one. This chapter suggests two tentative answers. First, Saxony’s role as the cradle of Social Democracy convinced both left liberals and National Liberals that only a close alliance with Conservatives and with Saxony’s conservative civil service offered protection against the “reds.” Second, the socio-economic profile of the Conservative Party in Saxony made it attractive as a political ally for Saxon liberals who did not want to leave behind the worlds of business and commerce. This was true for the top echelons of the two parties and for their rank and file members. Liberal leaders in Saxony could not resist moving in the direction their voters preferred, which in the 1880s was to the right. Whether in Reichstag or Landtag elections, the disadvantages of opposing Bismarck and the benefits of allying with Conservatives were two sides of a single

<sup>1</sup> Beust, *Viertel-Jahrhunderten*, 1:178.

coin. Protestant burghers who might have supported liberal parties in Germany's other federal states found many reasons to support Conservatives in Saxony.

## LIBERALISM ADRIFT

Today, National Liberals and Conservatives [in Saxony] cooperate in the interests of the Fatherland and the defense of the social order . . . Through such means the foundations of the German Reich appear to be better strengthened than they could ever be through bookish constitutional provisions of the most correct sort.

—speaker at the annual congress of the Saxon National Liberal Association, 1889<sup>2</sup>

We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run down.

—British Labour politician Aneurin Bevan, 1953<sup>3</sup>

In Bismarck's political universe the liberal movement was divided between insiders and outsiders. The reality was more complicated. But neither group benefited from the processes of differentiation that were transforming Saxon liberalism. After 1878 the National Liberals moved steadily to the right, not to challenge the Conservatives but to serve as their junior partner in the war on subversion. By 1887 National Liberals were firmly ensconced among the "parties of order" in Saxony. The fortunes of Saxony's left liberals declined after they split into Progressive and Radical factions.<sup>4</sup> The former gave priority to the common struggle against socialism and were considered to be one of Saxony's "state-supporting" parties. This did not prevent them being ridiculed as Saxony's "Closet Progressives,"<sup>5</sup> signaling that they, too, had subordinated themselves to Conservatives in the Landtag's lower chamber. By contrast, Radicals were considered closet socialists. Thus left-wing and right-wing liberals grew apart. The strength and unity of purpose they had demonstrated in the Landtag session of 1869/70 contrasted sharply with their weakness and disarray after 1884.

## NATIONAL LIBERALISM AND THE SAXON KARTELL

Among National Liberals in Saxony, a changing of the guard after German unification was largely complete by the mid-1880s. Karl Biedermann's service as a Saxon Landtag deputy ended in 1877.<sup>6</sup> National Liberals who were elected to the

<sup>2</sup> NLVKS, *Bericht über die ordentliche Generalversammlung* . . . 1889, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *The Observer*, 6 December 1953.

<sup>4</sup> Characterized as "*fortschrittlich*" and "*freisinnig*," respectively.

<sup>5</sup> *Sächsischer Kammerfortschritt*.

<sup>6</sup> Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:345–61; Biedermann, "Conservative," pts. I–II; Blum, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 2:28–99. On Biedermann see also ch. 1.

Reichstag in 1884 and 1887—like their colleagues elected to the Landtag—did not carve a high profile. Exceptions included Carl Tröndlin, Leipzig's deputy mayor, who was elected for 12: Leipzig-City in 1884 and 1887, and Otto Georgi, who had represented 22: Auerbach from 1871 to 1877 and then served as Leipzig's mayor from 1877 to 1899 (at which point he passed the chain of office to Tröndlin). Leipzigers continued to form the core of the Saxon party. National Liberals played almost no role in Dresden politics.<sup>7</sup> In other German cities National Liberals dominated municipal assemblies, councils, and mayoral offices; but a popular Saxon mayor was as likely to be a Conservative as a National Liberal.

Saxon National Liberals strongly supported passage of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1878. Each time the law came up for renewal—including in 1889/90—they were enthusiastically in favor. Few of them joined the Secession from the National Liberal Party in 1880.<sup>8</sup> By the time Secessionists joined with Progressives to form the German Radical Party in the spring of 1884, Biedermann and other National Liberals had virtually declared war on the Radicals, whom they saw as too quick to defend parliamentary privilege and too slow to join the war on socialism.<sup>9</sup> When Saxon National Liberals convened in July 1884, Biedermann hinted broadly that his party would nominate compromise candidates for the upcoming Reichstag elections only with Conservatives. He declared that the National Liberals' goal was to break the power of Progressives and the Center Party to form a majority in the Reichstag.<sup>10</sup>

In the Reichstag elections of October 1884, Saxon National Liberals bettered their share of the popular vote over 1881 from 14 percent to almost 18 percent. Then the Reichstag campaign of 1887 provided Saxon National Liberals with their greatest election triumph since the 1870s. Victory in ten of twenty-three Saxon constituencies—twice the number of seats they won in 1884—with more than 30 percent of the vote seemed to offer proof that their party would prosper in Saxony as long as its embraced Conservatives as brothers in arms. As Biedermann wrote later, "This result was so brilliant, . . . but also so surprising, that we thought we were obliged to do everything in our power to secure, if possible, a similar outcome in future elections. This meant . . . that the Kartell should be upheld fully and steadfastly during the period between [Reichstag] elections, which in turn meant carrying it over to Landtag elections as well."<sup>11</sup>

National Liberals were not entirely consistent about the best way to form a united front against socialism. Doing away with the second round of (run-off)

<sup>7</sup> See Nationalliberale Reichsverein zu Dresden, *Jahresberichte . . . 1894/95–1909/09*, SLUB, H. Sax. G. 364, 60.

<sup>8</sup> Heyderhoff/Wentzcke, *Liberalismus*, 2:355–7; Biedermann, *Fünfzig Jahre*, ch. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Pr. envoy Carl von Dönhoff, 30.4.84, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 6; cf. Biedermann, *Leben*, 2:347–54.

<sup>10</sup> Acting Pr. envoy Waldenburg, 7.7.84, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Biedermann, "Conservative, II." See maps for the Saxon RT elections of 1887 and Saxon party bastions in 1887, both in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. Kartell candidates won at least 60 percent of the vote in 18 of 23 Saxon WKe. Cf. Biedermann, *Fünfzig Jahre*, 143f.; Biedermann, "Rückblick," 6.

balloting was advocated at the party's 1888 convention. Although this initiative was quietly buried, Biedermann and others believed it might hold the key to defeating Social Democrats in the future. To a Leipzig audience in 1887 Biedermann had declared "run-off elections to be the very worst feature of our electoral system . . . It almost forces the parties into unnatural and even immoral coalitions . . . If the parties of order had held together in 1878 as they did [in 1887], not six but only two Social Democrats from Saxony would have entered the Reichstag. May we take note of this for all future elections!"<sup>12</sup> Similar motives lay behind the National Liberals' enthusiasm for extending Reichstag legislative periods from three to five years. They argued that this reform enhanced the reputation of Germany's constitutional system in comparison to those of Belgium and Italy.<sup>13</sup> By 1888 the Kartell seemed well-suited to unite "moderate" liberals and conservatives in Saxony and the Reich. Biedermann wrote to Bismarck in hopes of convincing him that the Saxon National Liberal Party would fulfill its duty as one of the *Mittelparteien* in the Reichstag.<sup>14</sup>

National Liberal Party membership in Saxony was reported to be 900 in April 1887, having risen with the election campaign excitement a few months earlier. Another election in 1893 helped boost membership to 1,530 by May 1895.<sup>15</sup> In the eastern administrative region of Bautzen the party had a total of fourteen paid-up members in 1889, in the region of Dresden only 142. The Leipzig region had by far the strongest following, with 536 members, while Zwickau had 227.<sup>16</sup> Almost all members of the party's executive committee lived in either Leipzig or Dresden, where academics, lawyers, businessmen, and municipal civil servants took the lead. Chemnitz, Zwickau, Zittau, and Meerane were more typically represented by manufacturers and factory owners.

The sociological profile of rank-and-file members was more diverse, but not much more. One scholar has estimated that in the early 1890s about 3 percent of party members belonged to the lower classes. The upper classes provided about 45 percent of members, while the lower-middle and upper-middle classes represented about 35 and 16 percent of members respectively.<sup>17</sup> Farmers were few and far between in the party—about 4 percent in all—and workers almost entirely absent. Roughly 30 percent of members pursued occupations in industry, about 10 percent in banking, insurance, and commerce, and about 18 percent in public service, the church, or voluntary associations. Saxony's National Liberal Party in the 1880s remained preeminently a bourgeois party—a party of local notables and the affluent.

<sup>12</sup> Biedermann, *Fünfzig Jahre*, 150f.

<sup>13</sup> NLVKS, *Bericht . . . 1889*, 7–8.

<sup>14</sup> Biedermann to Bismarck (excerpt, copy), n.d. [18.12.88], BAP, Rkz 673.

<sup>15</sup> NLVKS, *Bericht . . . 1885/1887/1888/1889*; NLVKS, *Mitglieder-Verzeichniss . . . 1888/1892/1895*.

<sup>16</sup> NLVKS, *Bericht . . . 1889*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Pohl, "Nationalliberalen," 198f. Cf. Pohl, "Politischer Liberalismus," 106.

## PROGRESSIVES AND RADICALS

The polarization of Saxon party politics in the 1880s placed left liberals in a vulnerable position. But one should resist the notion that left liberals stuck doggedly to principle while National Liberals perfected the art of compromise. In Saxony, as elsewhere in the Reich, all parties grappled with the problem of retaining some semblance of doctrinal purity while serving the national cause as they saw it.

It was the National Liberal Party that experienced a Secession in 1880 and lost heavily in the elections of 1881; but as the Anti-Socialist Law came into effect, German Progressives also stood at a crossroads. At a party congress held in November 1878, they approved a revised program. It reaffirmed classic liberal demands. However, it also charted a new course, as Rudolf Virchow signaled in his keynote address: "We must position ourselves as independent men—independent from the government above, and also from the masses below, which threaten the existing order . . . I believe, therefore, that we must seek support on the Right, among independent men, among the productive population, among property-owners, among the core of good old German burghers."<sup>18</sup> By the winter of 1880/81, Saxon Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz confidently observed that Saxon Progressives had been defanged. "Insofar as the Saxon Progressive Party still exists," there was little chance "that it might be driven into the camp of democrats and socialists." This party, he added, was "considerably 'more tame' than its counterpart in Prussia." However, during overlapping Landtag and Reichstag campaigns in 1881, the "radical" threat of left liberalism worried other parties in Saxony and government ministers.<sup>19</sup> National Liberals criticized the left liberals' tone and tactics with the same terms they applied to Social Democrats, referring to election stratagems, intrigues, and machinations.<sup>20</sup> War Minister Alfred von Fabrice claimed that Progressive supporters had been recruited in Dresden to gather information to attack Saxony's military administration.<sup>21</sup>

The spotlight of Reichstag elections in 1884 focused attention more intently on the misery of Saxon Progressives. The year began with a noteworthy speech by Curt Starke in the Landtag, in which he signaled that Saxony's Progressives would remain anti-socialist and governmental. To stormy applause from all sides of the house (except the Social Democrats) he declared, "The agitation of Social Democracy . . . makes it our duty to support the government in all directions."<sup>22</sup> Neither the vote on renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law nor the first annual congress of the German Radical Party in Saxony, both in May 1884, contributed much to clarifying the new party's role. A few Saxon Progressives in the Reichstag voted against extension of the law, but they were happy that their nay votes did not prevent the law being extended. They knew they owed their own seats in the

<sup>18</sup> Steinbrecher, "Parteiororganisation," 184f.

<sup>19</sup> Dönhoff, 10.6.81, 17.7.81, PAAAB, Deutschland 102, Vol. 3, and Sachsen 48, Bd. 6, respectively.

<sup>20</sup> *Neue Dresdner Nachrichten*, 1.5.81.

<sup>21</sup> Dönhoff, 16.5.83, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *LTMint* 1883/84, II.K., 1:562 (28.1.84); cf. *SParl*, 40.

Reichstag to unity among the Saxon “parties of order,” just as they also knew they would suffer defeat in the next election if restrictions on Social Democratic agitation were lifted.<sup>23</sup> At the party congress on 22 May, attended by 400–500 followers, party unity was preserved, but only just. Now the Saxon wing of the Radical Party had its own statutes and executive committee.<sup>24</sup>

The outcome of the Reichstag elections of 1884 shocked Saxon left liberals. August Bebel wrote that “middle-class radicalism” could now be pronounced “dead” in Germany.<sup>25</sup> The Prussian envoy Dönhoff suggested that left liberals had received their just desserts: they were digging the furrows from which Social Democrats reaped the harvest.<sup>26</sup> After the Landtag elections of 1885, Saxons now seemed divided into “two army camps”—the state-supporting and the state-destroying: “Liberalism in its present form appears unmistakably to have fallen prey to a process of dissolution.”<sup>27</sup> Bismarck was less sanguine. So were Saxon Conservatives. Their new party organ in Leipzig, the *Conservatives Vereinsblatt*, suggested that differences among National Liberals, Radicals, and Social Democrats were only a matter of degree: they wanted to force Bismarck to “dance to their tune,” resign, or “face the guillotine!”<sup>28</sup>

During the last four years of the 1880s Saxon left liberals continued to find a cool reception both from their leaders in Berlin and from would-be allies in Saxony. Most Saxon Radicals disagreed with party leader Eugen Richter’s determined opposition to Bismarck’s Army Bill in late 1886 and resented the difficult position it placed them in during the Reichstag campaign early the next year. Berlin party leaders instructed left liberals in Saxony to abstain when a run-off pitted a socialist against a candidate of the “parties of order.” This tactic won them no friends.<sup>29</sup> Saxon left liberals engaged in self-flagellation when the Conservatives did not apply the whip themselves. Just a few days after the main ballot in February 1887 the left-liberal *Dresdner Zeitung* disavowed the Radicals’ Berlin leadership. “The current caucus of the German Radical Party in the Reichstag, through its short-sighted and misguided tactics, has led to the ruination of liberalism in [our] land. The latter will no longer allow itself to be the plaything of a handful of self-interested and impatient men.”<sup>30</sup> This was a jolt. In the Landtag elections in autumn 1887, Richter’s wing of the party nominated candidates in only a few Saxon constituencies; these men were so obscure that not even the left-liberal *Zittauer Morgenzeitung* could lend them appeal.<sup>31</sup> Around the same time a German Radical State

<sup>23</sup> Bavarian envoy Gideon von Rudhart, 15.5.84; BHStAM II, MA 2853.

<sup>24</sup> Acting Pr. envoy Count von Waldenburg, 11.10.84; PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 12; Rudhart, 25.10.84; BHStAM II, MA 2853.

<sup>25</sup> Bebel to Engels, 24.11.84, BARuS, 2/II:150f.

<sup>26</sup> Dönhoff, 5.11.84; PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Dönhoff, 6.10.85; PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 14; Kuno von Rantzau to Dönhoff (drafts), 9/12.10.85, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Paraphrased in Dönhoff, 7.10.85. PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Rudhart, 16.1.87, and for other points below from reports of 2/10/23/28.2.87; BHStAM II, MA 2856.

<sup>30</sup> Dönhoff, 25.2.87, PAAAB, Deutschland No. 125, No. 3, Bd. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Dönhoff, 12.10.87, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 1.

Association for Saxony was founded. This accelerated but did not clarify the division of the regional party into “two unequal halves,” between which many Saxon left liberals soon “flailed helplessly”: “they followed first one and then the other tendency according to their momentary individual inclinations.”<sup>32</sup> The Richterites scored another victory in early 1889 when their State Association held a general assembly in Chemnitz and decided to field as many candidates as possible for the Landtag elections that autumn. If no party candidate were available, and if a candidate of the “parties of order” faced a Social Democrat, they declared they would not give the non-socialist their support. The “Chemnitz Resolution” was seized on by Conservatives as further evidence that left liberals were happy to see any Social Democrat elected.

Such animosity was still corrosive during Bismarck’s last year as chancellor. The Richterites upped the ante when they referred to the *Kammerfortschritt* as “conservatives in disguise.”<sup>33</sup> Things did not look more promising after the Landtag elections of 15 October 1889. As the stormy political season of 1889/90 approached, only the Landtag itself offered safe harbor to Saxon Progressives who wanted to work with Conservatives and National Liberals to combat Social Democracy. Everywhere else they were at sea without sail or rudder.

#### BUSINESSMEN AND OTHERS

What did it feel like to sit in a state parliament dominated by representatives of industry, trade, and commerce? Consider August Bebel’s reflections about his own experience as a Saxon Landtag deputy. Two decades after the suffrage reform of 1868, Saxony’s “assembly of estates” still seemed antediluvian:

A very considerable proportion of the [Saxon] chamber was made up of rural deputies whose political horizons were as narrow as the boundaries of their own constituency. [These were] people who had only the most laughable conceptions of what we Social Democrats actually wanted. Along with them went a number of small-town mayors who lived in a parochial middle-class milieu and thought the same way. The remaining deputies were made up of some government officials, a few industrialists, and a large contingent of lawyers. With only a few exceptions, the deputies were Saxon particularists of the narrowest sort, whereby the so-called Progressives could hardly be distinguished from the Conservatives. There wasn’t a single day when it was a pleasure to sit in such a chamber.<sup>34</sup>

When Otto Freytag and Wilhelm Liebknecht won election to the Saxon Landtag in 1877 and 1879, a controversy erupted within socialist ranks. At issue was whether these party members could swear the oath of allegiance to the Saxon king that was required of all Landtag deputies. The controversy came at an inopportune time for Bebel and Liebknecht. They faced challenges from two directions within their own party: from anarchists who condemned even the slightest endorsement of

<sup>32</sup> Dönhoff, 25.9.89, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 2, and for the following.

<sup>33</sup> *DZ*, 24.9.89. <sup>34</sup> BAmL, 784.

monarchical authority, and from moderates who believed their party should make “positive” contributions to parliamentary life, for example by supporting legislation that benefited German workers. With Marx’s blessing the Saxon Social Democrats quickly decided that swearing the oath was an acceptable price to pay for the opportunity to speak from the podium of the Landtag. In the 1880s the small Social Democratic caucus participated diligently in the business of the Landtag. On many issues—public school fees, religious instruction, state-sponsored fire insurance, women’s and child labor, industrial safety—the Social Democrats could test the limits of doctrinal purity in ways they could not in the Reichstag.<sup>35</sup>

The Landtag’s sociological profile provides evidence that Social Democrats were outsiders in almost every other sense, despite the difficulty of categorizing persons who may have divided their time between two, three, or more occupations.<sup>36</sup> A Landtag deputy might be an industrialist, an estate owner, and holder of various honorary offices (paid or unpaid), and parliamentary handbooks did not make it clear whether they were measuring the social position of deputies or their occupational activity: usually they fudged the issue and did both. Sociological analysis becomes more meaningful if we consider a large number of deputies elected over many years, but a second difficulty arises. Because Saxony experienced three major suffrage reforms, in 1868, 1896, and 1909, some general conclusions about the socio-economic background of Landtag deputies are valid for only one or two “suffrage regimes.”

A broad categorization of all Saxon deputies who sat in the lower chamber of the Landtag between 1869 and 1918 shows that more than 40 percent of them were active in industry, trade, and commerce. About one-quarter of deputies had agricultural backgrounds, while two other groups each provided about 15 percent of deputies: civil servants and the free professions. These proportions differed significantly by political party.

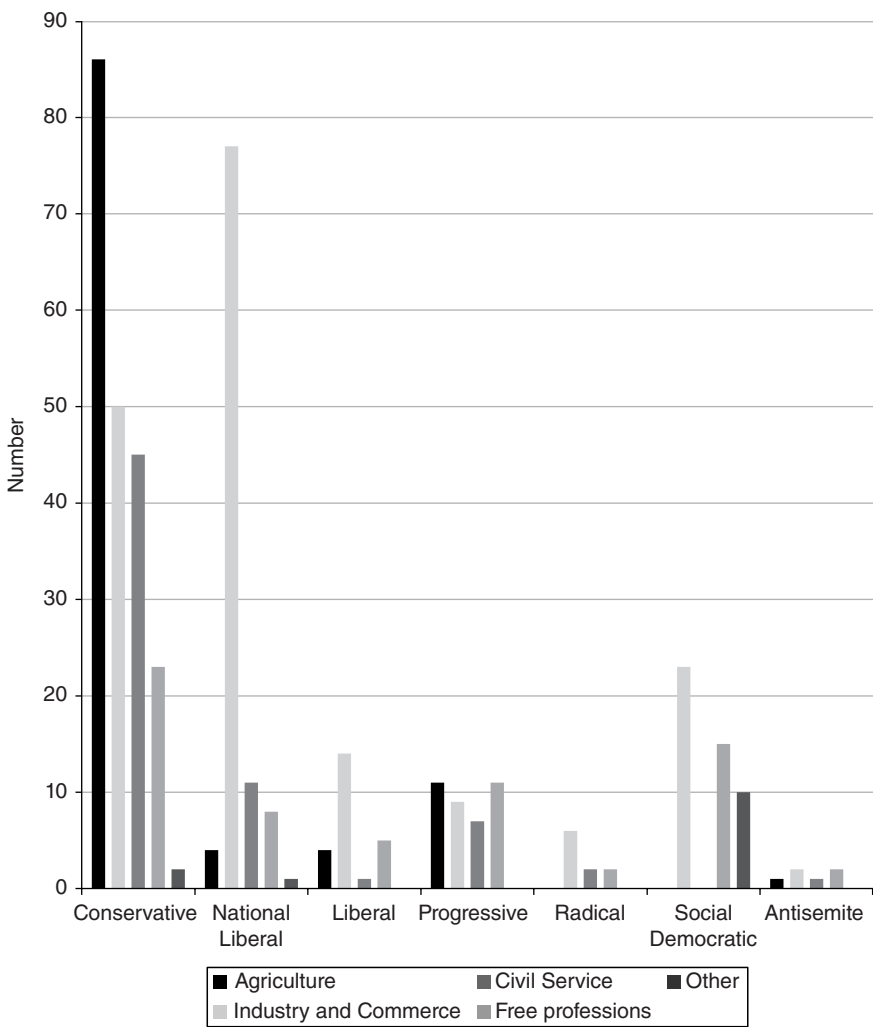
Especially noteworthy in Figure 5.1 is that Conservative deputies were not all agrarians. More than half of them came from industrial and commercial backgrounds, the civil service, and the free professions. These occupations were all represented in Progressive ranks too.

We may be surprised that only 25 percent of Landtag deputies came from agricultural backgrounds. Recall that in the eighty-member Landtag after 1868, forty-five seats were allocated to rural districts and only thirty-five to urban ones. Moreover, a tiny plot of land in the countryside that might have nothing more than a broken-down cottage on it sufficed to give its inhabitant the right to vote in Landtag elections, whereas apartment dwellers in the cities had to meet the three-Mark tax threshold for enfranchisement. (Currency reform had done away with the Thaler, which equaled three Marks.)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Lidtke, *Party*, 222–8, and works by Lesanovsky in the bibliography.

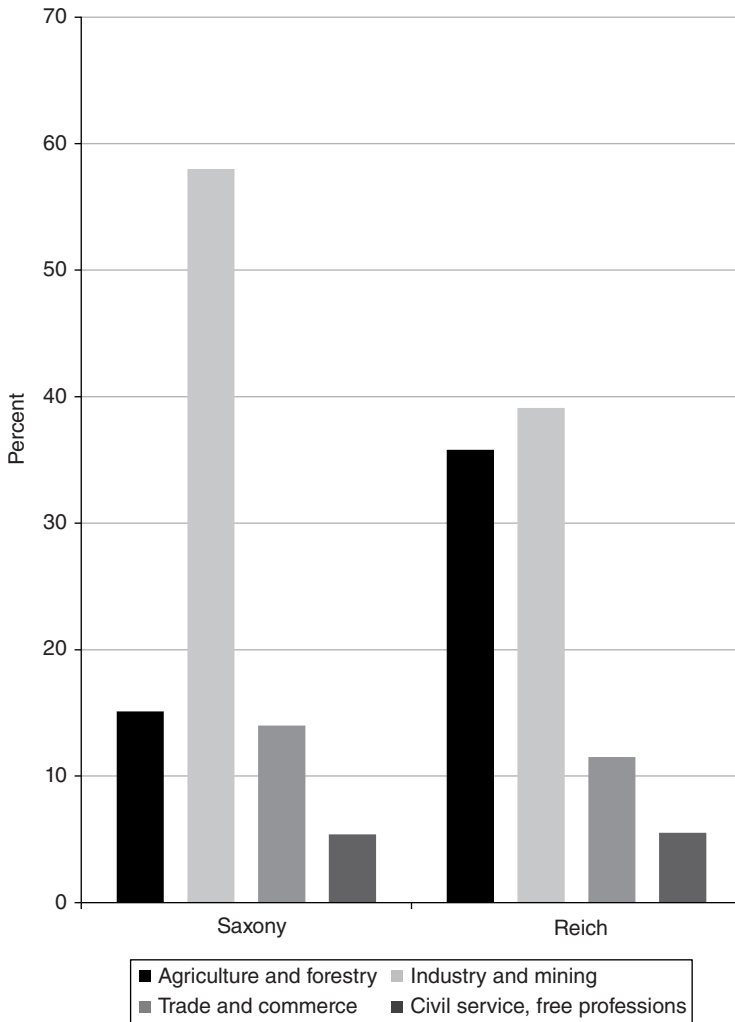
<sup>36</sup> *SParl*, 86–99. Cf. Thümmeler, “Landtag”; Thümmeler, “Zusammensetzung”; Schmidt, “Landtag.” Besides contemporary RT and LT handbooks see Kremer, *Aufbau*; Rosenbaum, *Beruf*. For the PAH see Plate, *Handbuch*; Mann, *Handbuch*; KDWR, pt. 2, chap. 6; for the Bavarian LT, Albrecht, “Sozialstruktur,” incl. statistical overviews 431, 441.





**Figure 5.1.** Saxon Landtag Deputies, Occupation and Party Affiliation, 1869–1918.  
*Sources:* Drawn by the author from *SParl* and *SLTW*.

Figure 5.2 tells us that in 1895 only about 15 percent of Saxons were dependent upon agriculture, compared to over 35 percent in the Reich. Hence agriculture, by this measure, was overrepresented in the Dresden parliament. Conversely, almost 60 percent of Saxons were dependent on industry and mining and almost 15 percent depended on trade and commerce, for a combined 72 percent. This compared to about 50 percent of Germans dependent on these sectors in the Reich. Were the interests of industry and commerce under-represented in the Saxon Landtag? With



**Figure 5.2.** Occupational Profile of Populations in Saxony and the Reich, 1895.

Sources: Drawn by the author from Kollmann, "Gliederung," *ZSSL* 59, no. 1 (1913); *SParl*, 87.

good reason, liberals claimed they were. Tellingly, though, liberals did not voice this complaint when the challenge of socialism seemed acute.

The Saxon parliament was a parliament of businessmen and others. It had an uncommonly high proportion of "all-round entrepreneurs" and "multi-functionaries."<sup>37</sup> This made it easier for deputies in the Saxon Landtag than for their counterparts in other German parliaments to reach across party lines. The

<sup>37</sup> For the following see esp. *SParl*, 86–113; Schröder, "Struktur"; Schröder, "Unternehmer." Also Dittrich, *Almanach* (1878); *Landtags-Almanach* . . . 1887.

close personal and professional relations between civil servants and entrepreneurs compelled Landtag deputies to cultivate connections in both the public and private sectors. One indicator of how important this nexus became is the fact that at least 43 of 181 businessmen—roughly one in four—were awarded the title of either commercial counselor or privy commercial councilor.<sup>38</sup> Another is that these businessmen represented the full range of Saxony's most prosperous industrial sectors. Considering that large factories were still the exception in Saxony in the 1880s, artisanal and other small workshops were relatively under-represented in the Landtag. This under-representation created an opportunity for Social Democrats and antisemites: they both competed vigorously for lower-middle-class votes. Wage laborers—those without other means of income—were prevented from gaining seats in the Landtag by the 30-Mark tax threshold required of all candidates.

Industry and agriculture did not compete on a level playing field for access to the legislature. The rhythm of Landtag sessions favored longer parliamentary service by agrarians. After Landtag elections were held in September or October every two years, parliament typically convened in November and was adjourned the following March or April. This was a period when a farmer could direct his attention to Landtag affairs. Factory owners and traders had less free time to spend on parliamentary business in these months: Leipzig's spring fair and fiscal year end, among many other duties, demanded their attention.

Figure 5.1 demonstrates that representatives of Saxon agriculture were found overwhelmingly in Conservative ranks. Agriculturalists accounted for about one-quarter of all Landtag deputies over the course of the empire, and 80 percent of these joined the Conservative caucus. Of those who gravitated to the liberal parties, most were owners of modest agricultural holdings—some can be described as estate owners, many others as farmers. Socially and ideologically these deputies often had little in common with the owners of knight's estates. Members of the free professions were almost equally divided among the Conservative (23) and liberal (26) caucuses. Conservatives and the Saxon government seem to have shared the view that "state-supporting" civil servants could best help the good cause by remaining in their bureaucratic positions, not by running for parliament. This belief may explain why the Saxon Landtag contained relatively fewer civil servants overall than did the Reichstag and most other German parliaments. Yet the idea that all public servants were obliged to uphold the principle of authority could not dispel government fears that Social Democracy was making inroads among railway, postal, and telegraph workers.

The years 1869 to 1881 represented a watershed. The number of large estate owners who had sat in the Landtag in the 1850s and early 1860s was reduced with the 1868 suffrage reform. Twenty-two owners of knight's estates had sat in the Landtag of 1866–68—over one quarter of all deputies. The pre-reform Landtag also included nine aristocrats. After the 1869 election, only eleven *Rittergut* owners and two aristocrats remained. Moreover, fifty-seven of the eighty deputies elected in

<sup>38</sup> (Geheimer) Kommerzienrat.

the general election of 1869 had not previously sat in the Landtag. These factors provided an incentive for Conservatives to look for suitable candidates among other social groups in future election campaigns and to widen their appeal. Between 1869 and 1895, the real growth area for Conservatives was among businessmen. Only one businessman sat in a caucus of thirty-seven Conservative deputies in 1869. By 1881, when the caucus had risen to forty-six deputies—a secure majority—Conservative ranks included six factory owners or manufacturers. Taking the long view, we can say that members of the Conservative caucus in Saxony's Landtag were much more bourgeois, much more urban, and much better integrated into business and professional circles that were their party colleagues in the Reichstag and the Prussian House of Deputies. Conservatives in Saxony also stood closer to their National Liberal and left-liberal colleagues than did Conservatives in other German parliaments. This made cooperation among the “state-supporting” parties easier.

Did it also contribute to the emergence of a “nationalist camp”?<sup>39</sup> The evidence is mixed. The Kartell parties fought tooth-and-nail among themselves for the allegiance (and the votes) of the same social constituency from which many of their Landtag deputies came: members of the Protestant urban bourgeoisie. These Saxon burghers ranged from artisans, shopkeepers, retailers, and small farmers among the lower-middle classes, to teachers, professors, civil servants, and other members of the educated middle classes, to wealthy industrialists, bankers, and holders of middle-sized or large estates who constituted a large part of the upper-middle class. Between 1878 and 1890, when representatives of these groups sat in the Saxon Landtag, they generally put partisanship aside, at least when it was a matter of silencing Social Democratic challengers. However, the pronouncement that the Saxon electorate could be easily divided into the “state-supporting” and “destructive” camps was so much wishful thinking. Saxon ministers knew better, and so did Saxon party leaders. That is why their calls for more organization, more discipline, and more attention to the common threat did not subside between 1878 and 1890.

One final note about Saxony's parliamentary culture in the 1880s is in order. As Social Democrats entered Saxony's parliament, they went straight to the attack. Already in 1884, SPD deputies were “discharging their assumed duties as Tribunes of the People with an activity not shown by them in any previous session. They intervene[d] in every sitting with questions, motions, remonstrances, and explanations.” Yet they also “denounc[ed] things and persons in language which, but for the privilege of parliament, would involve them in endless prosecutions for libel and sedition.”<sup>40</sup> Social Democrats faced a phalanx of opponents united by a common *Habitus* and resistance to change: SPD speeches were as likely to elicit silence as derision.<sup>41</sup> The socialist Georg von Vollmar described his first impressions upon taking up his Landtag seat in 1883. In the process he echoed Bebel's claim that Social Democrats could never feel at home in a Landtag where political enmity was reinforced by a socio-cultural divide. Vollmar recalled

<sup>39</sup> As postulated in Rohe, *Wählertraditionen*.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Dönhoff, 6.11.81, 9.2.82, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bde. 6 and 7, respectively.

<sup>41</sup> Strachey, 23.2.84, PRO, FO 68/168.

how I stood there on the day I entered the chamber, how I was surrounded by a ring of candles that radiated a real sense of ceremony where everyone was dressed in black, how the president gave the representatives of the people a school-lesson on the sanctity of the oath, which we had to read back to him word for word . . .

And then the sessions themselves! We were squeezed together like herrings in a tin, so that the whole row had to stand up if someone wanted to leave. In front of us sat a number of National Liberals; frequently we could tell . . . just how much they disappointed of and were appalled by our conversations.

Opposite us [sat] their excellencies, the state ministers, into whom no streak of modern thinking had penetrated and before whom the whole chamber, by every entrance and exit, bent low as though it were a cornfield moved by the wind . . .

And surrounding our [Social Democratic] deputies were the representatives of the other parties, who for us really were “a reactionary mass” and who accepted our most elementary statements with as much interest and understanding as if we had been speaking to a lifeless wall.

My admiration for the Saxon comrades who were able to persevere [in the chamber] longer than I did sprang principally from the fact that neither rage nor boredom killed them off.<sup>42</sup>

## CONSERVATIVES AND RADICAL ANTISEMITES

The Jewish question is legitimate, and the number of staunch antisemites is larger than one imagines . . . The life of our people must . . . win new strength from the fertile ground of living Christianity. Those are the goals of the Conservative Party . . . With serious antisemitism we will always be on friendly terms.

—anonymous contributor to the Conservative newspaper  
*Das Vaterland*, 1889<sup>43</sup>

That branch of the art of lying which consists in very nearly deceiving your friends without quite deceiving your enemies.

—of propaganda. Francis M. Cornford<sup>44</sup>

Saxon Conservatives exploited liberal disunity openly and cynically. After the mid-1870s they ensured that another “liberal era” did not put state governance or the Saxon Landtag suffrage on a new footing. But did they register positive accomplishments while they sat in the driver’s seat? If their goal was to hold the “party of revolution” at bay, their victory was ambiguous: the socialist caucus in the Landtag remained isolated, but Social Democrats kept winning votes. Gradually Conservatives and other Saxons shook off their traditional particularism and embraced the imperial idea (*Reichsidee*)—always with lingering doubts. Most important of all,

<sup>42</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Parteitag* . . . 1903, 18–20.

<sup>44</sup> *Microcosmographia Academica* (1908/1922).

<sup>43</sup> *Vaterl*, 19.1.89.

Conservatism was transformed by the rise of radical antisemitism. Although the popularity of antisemitism in Germany seemed to ebb in the mid-1880s, the Saxon case reveals continuities from the 1870s to the 1890s. How did Conservative antipathy to liberalism evolve into a focused, potent form of Conservative antisemitism? Any answer must consider antisemitism's intended victims.

## JEWS AND OTHERS

Diplomats stationed in Dresden predicted in 1879 that the new antisemitic movement would have little impact on Saxony—and Saxon antisemites little impact on national developments—because Saxony was home to so few Jews.<sup>45</sup> Only the diplomats' arithmetic was sound. Whereas Berlin alone had over 45,000 Jews, the entire Kingdom of Saxony had fewer than 6,500.<sup>46</sup>

From the perspective of 1870, Saxon Jews could take pride in the progress they been made during the previous century. They were no longer a marginalized social group: they were a religious community—or rather a community of communities (*Gemeinde*)—with large congregations in Dresden and Leipzig. Social success, economic security, and the enjoyment of civil liberties characterized the bourgeois existence of many who felt they could be good Jews and good Germans at the same time.<sup>47</sup>

Even as the “liberal era” dawned, state authorities never stopped insisting that Saxony was a Christian state. After emancipation, Jews were still effectively excluded from civil service and judicial positions in Saxony. The state did everything it could to deny Jewish immigrants from gaining Saxon citizenship. And Jewish religious communities enjoyed few of the privileges provided to Protestants or even to Catholics.<sup>48</sup> Jews responded by sending petitions to the Landtag and the Saxon state ministry, asking them to overturn remaining barriers. Such initiatives were consistently rebuffed.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1880s Leipzig's judicial authority rejected the application of a young Jew who was eager to begin training as a court clerk. Without ruling out such applications altogether, it clearly wanted to approve as few of them as possible, “in order that Leipzig does not, like Breslau and Berlin, become a gathering point for young Jewish jurists.”<sup>50</sup> A decade later Saxony's government leader boasted about the beneficial effect of such discrimination. It ensured that Jewish law students were given “special treatment” early in their training: civil service appointments were simply beyond their grasp.<sup>51</sup> Even this wasn't enough for one leading antisemite, who

<sup>45</sup> Austrian envoy Franckenstein, 20.12.79, HHStAV, PAV/42; British envoy George Strachey, 20.12.79, PRO FO 68/163; cf. Dönhoff, 24.11.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Schäbitz, *Juden*, chs. 3–8; cf. Lehmann, *Schriften*, 201–13; Lässig, “Emancipation”; Segall, “Juden”; Blau, “Entwicklung”; Levy, *Geschichte*.

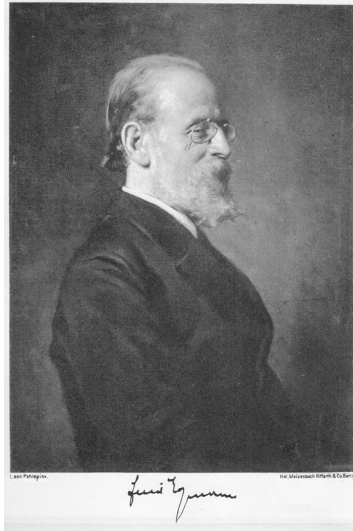
<sup>47</sup> See e.g. Kirsch, “Ringens,” 25; more broadly, Lässig, *Wege*.

<sup>48</sup> Schäblitz, *Juden*, 400 and passim; cf. the whitewash in Levy, *Geschichte*, 101, 108.

<sup>49</sup> Lehmann, *Schriften*, 154–69; “Emil Lehmann's Petition to Improve the Legal Rights of Jews in Saxony (25 November 1869),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1796](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1796).

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Held, “Antisemitismus,” 113.

<sup>51</sup> MdAA Georg v. Metzsch to Pr MdJ Heinrich v. Schönstedt [1896], cited in Held, “Antisemitismus,” 114.



**Figure 5.3.** Emil Lehmann, Dresden Lawyer and Assemblyman.

Source: Emil Lehmann, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1899), frontispiece.

was asked by a friend to recommend a fellow antisemite to defend him in court: “I don’t know any!” he replied, “other than young clerks who cannot do trials. In all of Leipzig I don’t know a single lawyer with the right ‘cut’ . . . *Que faire?*”<sup>52</sup>

Discrimination against Saxon Jews would have been worse between 1860 and 1890 without the efforts of Emil Lehmann (Figure 5.3). Lehmann was the first Jew to be elected (in 1865) to Dresden’s municipal assembly. From 1875 to 1881 he also held a seat for the Progressive Party in the lower house of the Landtag. Long before that Lehmann had turned his attention to the struggle for Jewish rights: he was elected head of Dresden’s Jewish *Gemeinde* in February 1869.<sup>53</sup> Initially, his writings displayed argumentative brilliance: they tended to diminish the cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles. In later years, Lehmann grew more bitter. His knowledge of collusion among Conservatives, antisemites, and the Saxon state compelled Lehmann to denounce the Saxon Conservative Association’s call in 1892 for Jews to be excluded from positions of authority. “Where and how are [Saxon Jews] supposed to have exerted their ‘obtrusive and seditious influence?’” Lehmann asked. “Their political influence is nil. Neither in the [Landtag] chambers nor in the rural county councils, neither in the city council and the city assembly nor in the chamber of commerce, neither as jurors nor as commercial judges are

<sup>52</sup> Theodor Fritsch to Wilhelm Marr, 11.6.87, kindly supplied by the Staatsarchiv Hamburg, NL Marr, Bestand A, Nr. 67.

<sup>53</sup> Lehmann, “Ueber die judenfeindliche Bewegung in Deutschland,” Lehmann, *Schriften*, 215–24; excerpted as “Emil Lehmann Addresses Leipzig Jews on the Antisemitic Movement (11 April 1880),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1802](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1802).

adherents of the Jewish faith active in Saxony . . . And in judicial and administrative offices or teaching positions? Where in Saxony is the Jew?" Citing the Conservatives' demand for "support for all honest labor," Lehmann complained that "this very proposition [is] breached by Conservatives with their boycott call '*Don't buy from Jews!*'"<sup>54</sup>

Demographic factors also fueled the rise of Saxon antisemitism. National unification inaugurated a migration of Jews into and through Saxony. This development supported antisemitic claims that Saxony was being inundated by "nationally unreliable" elements. In 1890 the proportion of Jews among Saxony's population was only 0.27 percent—four times lower than the Reich average of 1.15 percent. However, the proportion of Jews in Saxony had doubled since 1871, when it stood at 0.13 percent, whereas in the Reich it had declined slightly over the same period. Jews settled at differing rates, and took up different occupations, in Saxony's three largest cities, Dresden, Chemnitz, and Leipzig. After a number of Leipzig's suburbs were incorporated into the city proper in 1889–92, it had the highest proportion of Jews among these cities. It was home to almost half of all Jews living in Saxony (see Table 5.1).

Even though Jews represented a tiny proportion of Saxony's population, a newspaper clipping in the private papers of Saxon Conservative leader Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha suggests why he and other Christian Conservatives felt under siege. The clipping claimed to document the rate of population increase among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews during the "liberal era" following unification (see Table 5.2). Due to Saxony's rapid overall population increase, the rates for all three confessions exceeded the national average. Friesen and other Conservatives had little interest in calling attention to the Catholic "threat" in Saxony, which was also demographically miniscule. Instead they concentrated on the Jews. This newspaper article purported to show a 131 percent increase of Jews in Saxony between 1871 and 1885. By a factor of ten this rate of increase exceeded that of any other federal state.<sup>55</sup> Already in 1885 such statistics were used to support antisemitic claims about Jewish "domination" in Saxony—that is, before an even stronger wave of Jewish immigration from eastern Europe began in the late 1890s.

Recent scholarship on Saxony's Jews has shown how much they contributed to scholarship, culture, municipal improvement, and philanthropy. Whether seeking emancipation for workers or women, Saxon Jews were often in the forefront of national movements. Jews found many opportunities for integration—in the workplace, in a gymnastics club, in the tavern. They also found exclusion. The path to school became one of many "neuralgic points" where Jews experienced the rise of antisemitism and the local appeal of the movement's national leaders first-hand. Friedrich Salzburg, who grew up in Dresden during these years, contrasted the relative lack of tension in his own schoolroom with the abuse he and his sisters encountered on the way there each morning. "In Saxony . . . there was great

<sup>54</sup> Lehmann, *Schriften*, 288–90.

<sup>55</sup> 1871: 3,346 Jews; 1885: 7,755; see PAS, 17; Höppner, "Migration"; Höppner, "Reaktionen"; Höppner, "Ostjude."



Table 5.1. Jewish Populations in Saxony and Germany, 1849–90

Territory	Year	Total Population (no.)	Jewish Population (no.)	Proportion of Jews (%)
Dresden	1849	94,092	672	0.71
	1871	177,089	1,246	0.70
	1880	220,818	2,228	1.01
	1890	276,522	2,595	0.94
Leipzig	1849	62,374	320	0.51
	1871	106,925	1,768	1.65
	1880	149,081	3,179	2.13
	1890*	357,122	4,225	1.18
Chemnitz	1849	30,753	—	—
	1875	78,209	211	0.27
	1880	95,123	294	0.31
	1890	138,954	953	0.69
Saxony	1849	1,894,431	1,022	0.05
	1871	2,556,244	3,346	0.13
	1880	2,972,805	6,516	0.22
	1890	3,502,684	9,368	0.27
Reich	1848	34,022,000	394,650	1.16
	1871	41,060,000	512,153	1.25
	1880	45,230,000	561,612	1.24
	1890	49,420,000	567,884	1.15

Notes: Total population figures rounded for Germany. \* Includes suburbs incorporated into the city of Leipzig from 1.1.89 to 1.1.92. Schäßitz lists Leipzig’s population without these suburbs as 179,689 (1890), including 3,796 Jews (2.11 percent). Wächter lists Leipzig’s population (1890) as 295,025.

Sources: Blau, “Entwicklung,” 181; Schäßitz, *Juden*, 457–9; Meyer/Brenner, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte*, 2:59, 3:13; Segall, *Juden*, 40; Diamant, *Chronik . . . Chemnitz*, 20; Wächter, “Städte,” 188f.

Table 5.2. German Population Increase, by Confession and State, 1871–85

State	Rate of Population Increase from 1871 to 1885		
	Protestants (%)	Catholics (%)	Jews (%)
Prussia	13.74	16.35	12.58
Bavaria	13.30	10.82	5.99
<b>Saxony</b>	<b>23.36</b>	<b>62.57</b>	<b>131.01</b>
Württemberg	10.36	8.07	7.56
Baden	15.34	6.55	5.45
Hessen	9.90	16.95	2.92
Alsace-Lorraine	15.60	–2.01	–9.90
Reich	14.82	12.88	9.96

Note: Allegedly according to census figures from 1 Dec. 1871 and 1 Dec. 1885.

Source: “Das Wachstum des jüdischen Elements,” unidentified newspaper clipping citing the “Jewish-Radical” *Börsen-Courier* (Berlin); SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576. Saxon figures highlighted in original.

enthusiasm for [Adolf] Stöcker and [Hermann] Ahlwardt and their efforts, and we children could not help but feel that. In those years my sisters could hardly go to school without hearing the rowdy boys call after them along the way: 'Jew-girl! Hep hep hep, Itzig,' or similar things. For us lads it wasn't much different. Things often came to blows on the street, whereby the fellows who were our neighbors . . . stuck with us and helped us out."<sup>56</sup>

Saxon society included a tiny sliver of upper-class and upper-middle-class Jews in the industrial and financial sectors: the Arnhold banking family is a good example drawn from this group.<sup>57</sup> A larger middle-class group included businessmen, doctors, and lawyers, while immigration from the east brought *mittelständisch* Jews to the garment trade, working-class Jews to the tobacco trade, and itinerant Jewish hawkers to villages whose inhabitants might never have seen a Jew before. While a few Jewish families set down roots as soon as they reached eastern Saxony—in Upper Lusatia, for example—they rarely felt comfortable in this mainly rural region. Most headed for Saxony's urbanized western half, above all Leipzig.<sup>58</sup> There they found a warmer reception than in Dresden.

Saxon Jews were easy targets for those who blamed them for Germany's financial woes and public scandals after 1873. How far the fragile balance of "mistrust and pragmatism"<sup>59</sup> that characterized Jewish-Gentile relations over previous decades had tipped by 1879 was highlighted in one diplomat's report from Dresden. Jews were so heavily represented on the staffs of liberal newspapers that their enemies claimed that, in another ten years, "there will not be an uncircumcised journalist in the Empire." But it was ludicrous to accuse the Jews of seeking domination over Germany's economic life, let alone over German culture, politics, or the press. With one exception—this observer was no doubt referring to Emil Lehmann—he noted that no Jew played a prominent role in Saxon public life. Nevertheless, this small minority of Jews had achieved enough success and influence to make them "profoundly obnoxious" to Saxon gentiles.

The mere *prospect* of economic dislocation was often enough to turn Saxons against the Jews. In November 1880, when another diplomat looked back on twelve months of antisemitic excitement, he criticized the "envy and commercial jealousy" of Christian businessmen who, because of their own "lack of energy and experience, [saw] their businesses declining and those of their more industrious Jewish competitors blossoming."<sup>60</sup> When another observer looked at the same lower-middle classes, he stressed the ability of Conservatives and Saxon civil servants to instrumentalize resentment and align it with their own anti-liberal agendas. "The setting-in of this Conservative reaction" against "the National Liberal system," he wrote, had "afforded an obvious opportunity for an antisemitic crusade." This "crusade" was already indistinguishable from the "clamor against

<sup>56</sup> Schäbitz, *Juden*, 350.

<sup>57</sup> A monograph on the Arnholds is planned by Simone Lässig; for context see the special issue on Jews and antisemites in Dresden, *Dresdner Hefte* 18, no. 61 (2000).

<sup>58</sup> Schäblitz, *Juden*, 395 and passim; cf. Blau, "Entwicklung," 186, on Leipzig.

<sup>59</sup> Schäbitz, *Juden*, ch. 9. <sup>60</sup> Dönhoff, 24.11.80, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 5.

Manchester doctrines, or for a return to the restrictions of labor, or for sharper penal laws, or against . . . usury, the stock exchange, and the 'Golden International.'" Saxony's confessional makeup played a significant role here: Jew-baiting in Saxony was fed by "High Protestant feeling" that "could not fail to swell the cry."<sup>61</sup> Even Jews in Leipzig felt the chill, especially in the 1880s: "First the Israelites were hauled out of the honorific offices . . . in which they had provided Leipzig exemplary service. That wasn't difficult. Then these honorific municipal offices were hermetically sealed off to them—a super-clever move, it was thought. And just as one shut oneself off from [the Jews] in public life, so one did socially too."<sup>62</sup>

#### FELLOW TRAVELERS I

Modern antisemitism emerged as a political movement around 1879. In the preceding decade German antisemitism had gathered steam mainly as a literary phenomenon. Yet the organizational and programmatic development of the German Conservative Party was dependent on the same propagandists who used the economic downturn after 1873 to claim that Germany's woes lay with liberalism, capitalism, and the Jews. From the time he edited the Conservatives' flagship *Kreuzzeitung* at mid-century, Bismarck's advisor Hermann Wagener injected antisemitism into his journalistic, organizational, and electoral activities.<sup>63</sup> Antisemitic articles and cartoons appeared regularly in the *Kreuzzeitung* as well as the *Berliner Revue* and the *Kalender* of the Prussian People's Association. By the mid-1870s, the early activities of the German Conservative Party and its associated lobby group, the Association of Tax- and Economic Reformers, relied heavily on well-known antisemites of the day. Many in the party sympathized with Franz Perrot and his "Era Articles," which appeared in the *Kreuzzeitung* in 1875.<sup>64</sup> In this series Perrot attacked Bismarck's leading liberal ministers and his Jewish banker, Gerson von Bleichröder. He charged that these men's *Judenpolitik* had made Germany a ready victim for economic disaster.<sup>65</sup> The Conservatives' chairman repaired relations with the chancellor in 1876.<sup>66</sup> Yet the party's first *de facto* secretary was Carl Wilmanns, author of *The "Golden" International and the Necessity of a Social Reform Party*, which appeared in 1876. Wilmanns's scurrilous book appeared in the publishing house of Martin Anton Niendorf, who was the general secretary of the Association of Tax- and Economic Reformers and a well-known propagandist for the agrarian cause.<sup>67</sup> Niendorf published his own, Wilmanns's, and others' antisemitic tracts, and his German Reform Association, founded in Berlin in 1876,

<sup>61</sup> Strachey, 20.12.79, PRO FO 68/163.

<sup>62</sup> W. Neumann cited in Schäbitz, *Juden*, 341.

<sup>63</sup> New and definitive: Albrecht, *Antiliberalismus*.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, "Perrot"; further details and references in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Perrot, *Bismarck*. Bleichröder had been ennobled in 1872.

<sup>66</sup> On the DKP's initial reception in Saxony, see Strachey, 29.7.76 (draft), PRO 215/34; Bavarian envoy Gasser to Bavarian FO, 19.7.76, BHStAM II, MA 2848; and Pr. envoy Solms to Prussian FO, 11/17/27.1.77, PAAAB, Sachsen 45, Bd. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Wilmanns, *"Goldene" Internationale*.

preceded Alexander Pinkert's association of the same name in Dresden three years later.<sup>68</sup> A combination of antisemitism and anti-liberalism was also communicated to the party faithful via the Conservatives' other leading newspapers in the early 1880s, including the *Deutsches Tageblatt* and Heinrich Engel's staunchly Protestant *Reichsbote*, both published in Berlin. These newspapers regularly attacked Bismarck's Jewish banker and prominent Jewish National Liberals such as Eduard Lasker. For Conservatives who preferred to avoid Perrot's explicit attacks on Bismarck's *Judenpolitik*, the demand for Christian authorities in state and society needed no further elaboration.<sup>69</sup>

In Saxony, antisemitic Conservatives were drawn from both non-noble and noble ranks. During the 1880s, the Saxon Conservative chairman Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha aired his antisemitic views freely in the official journal of the German Society of Nobles, the *Deutsches Adelsblatt*. The relative social heterogeneity of Saxon Conservatism appears to have contributed to the willingness of Friesen and his "adjutant" Arnold von Frege-Weltzien to regard antisemitism as a key weapon in their political arsenal.<sup>70</sup> They hoped it would bring diverse social groups into close enough proximity to reconstitute Conservative politics on a new, popular basis. Consider a letter Frege wrote in 1880 to one such Conservative: Imperial Baron Karl von Fechenbach-Laudenbach, whose private wealth and zeal for intrigue led him to draft an antisemitic Conservative program. Frege explained to Fechenbach why it was impossible for the party's Reichstag deputies to advocate antisemitic policies openly. On the one hand, Frege claimed that Conservatives could not jeopardize the young party's standing in national politics by undertaking popular agitation that would prove uncomfortable for Prussian Conservatives or Bismarck: "We must refrain from appearing before the masses with promises and slogans, whose sad impossibility of fulfilment is all too clear, at least to those of us in the Reichstag." On the other hand, Frege already chafed under the yoke that Bismarck had fashioned for the Conservative Party in hopes of establishing a national Kartell.<sup>71</sup> "We unfortunately have in our midst, due to the 'might before right' policies of the last twenty years, such a large number of pseudo-Conservative creatures, so many fearful souls who want never to incur the displeasure of the government or the so-called liberal bourgeoisie, that—between us—I think we cannot have doubts about how weak our cause still is."

Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha (Figure 5.4) was more willing than Frege to pin his flag to the antisemitic mast. As he wrote in 1888, "I am a Conservative, and *as such* I regard the battle against the Jews and their destructive influence on our national development as the most important task of my party."<sup>72</sup> Friesen felt that Saxony's

<sup>68</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nr. 15364; *Deutsche Landes-Zeitung*, 2.11.76; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1575.

<sup>69</sup> Further details and references in Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 3–6; idem, *German Right*, chs. 7–8.

<sup>70</sup> Also known as Frege-Abtnaundorf. His estate Abtnaundorf was located just northeast of Leipzig.  
<sup>71</sup> Frege to Fechenbach, 24.10.80, BAK, NL Fechenbach, Nr. 38; see also Frege's letters to Friesen in SStAL, RG Rötha, Nrn. 273, 275, 1576.

<sup>72</sup> Friesen to *Der Kulturkämpfer* (draft), 24.9.88, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 275 (emphasis added). See also *CVbl*, 15.1.88, 30.10.88; *Vaterl*, 19.1.89.



**Figure 5.4.** Baron Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha.

Source: Undated photograph from *Der Leipziger Illustrierte Wochenschrift*, Nr. 12 (8 December 1906), SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1579.

overwhelmingly Protestant population faced the “threat” of political Catholicism, but he added that Saxons and other Germans faced a more immediate danger: Jewish immigration from eastern Europe. This fear animated Friesen when he drafted an unpublished Conservative manifesto (1879) that professed unwavering loyalty to “German faith, German love, German loyalty, German essence, German song and German word, German morality.”<sup>73</sup> These elements of *Deutschtum* “must never be taken away by the liberals’ ability to devise false, foreign, and demagogic theories!” When he published his memoirs shortly before his death in 1910, Friesen had no energy left for attacks on liberalism. But he returned to the themes of racial purity and nobility of spirit as key elements of his *Weltanschauung*, citing with approval the writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain.<sup>74</sup>

Another issue on which Conservatives and antisemites saw eye to eye was the scarcity of credit. In Saxony—though not only there—the provision of credit was of vital significance to many groups within the Conservative Party’s target constituency, in the countryside and in cities too. Such groups included indebted holders of landed estates, small-scale farmers, artisans, and small businessmen and shopkeepers eager to maintain their distance from a proletarian existence. It was in order to rally some of these groups to the Conservative flag that Karl Mehnert founded the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association in 1866.<sup>75</sup> By the mid-1870s, the issue of credit could be folded into larger debates about commodity exchanges,

<sup>73</sup> SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577.

<sup>74</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Schwert*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Johann Karl Gotthelf Mehnert (1811–85) was a MdLT 1864–85. He was the father of Karl Paul Mehnert (1852–1922), who sat in the II.K. 1885–1909 and then in the I.K. 1909–18.

the value of human labor, free trade, stock-market crashes, railway scandals, the protection of “national work,” and the “moral economy” of capitalism itself. Conservatives accused Jews and liberals of conspiring to render Germany’s economic system dysfunctional by exploiting the “little man” in society. This was what a contributor to the Saxon Conservatives’ *Neue Reichszeitung* clearly intended during the Reichstag election campaign of 1877: “In the guise of Jewish businessmen, the National Liberals have sent their agents into the most isolated corners of our land; everywhere these people are working with their characteristic doggedness and energy on behalf of the unitary state.”<sup>76</sup> Held together with the glue of conspiracy theories, alleged exploitation, and social unfairness, anti-liberalism and antisemitism were used over and over again in Conservative publications from the early 1870s onward to target the (real and potential) victims of liberal economics. To sample such writing is to appreciate its increasingly radical tone.<sup>77</sup>

As party members sought to “update” the Conservative Party—particularly outside Prussia—three terms resonated loudly in their arguments: “Christian,” “social,” and “reform.” “Christian Conservatism” held the widest appeal: it subsumed a defence of the Christian state, Christian authorities, and a Christian press. But “Christian-social” provided a means to combine attacks on the liberal capitalist “disorder” with arguments identifying the Jews as those most centrally responsible for economic instability. At the same time, it allowed Conservatives to proclaim their abhorrence of Marxist socialism and their determination to help the German *Michel* in his struggle against the unseen powers of big business and high finance. Hence Court Preacher Adolf Stöcker worked to realize his anti-liberal and antisemitic goals when he established the Christian Social Party. Until the mid-1890s this party served as a beacon for antisemites within the Conservative Party who sought to modernize Prussian Conservatism and create a mass basis for the movement. When the challenge of Social Democracy loomed larger in the political calculations of Conservatives, the third element of the triad, “reform,” became important. Few Conservatives would have objected to the goals announced on the masthead of Dresden’s most antisemitic newspaper, the *Deutsche Reform*: “Organ of the German Reform Movement. Protector of Working People against International Manchesterism and Stock-Exchange Liberalism. Daily Newspaper for Politics, Honorable Business Practices, and Conversation.”<sup>78</sup>

These examples suggest why we should abandon any notion that Conservatives “co-opted,” “instrumentalized,” or “tamed” radical antisemitism. Instead we should recognize the central role antisemitism played in a broader spectrum of ideology and practice. That role was highlighted by one foreign observer during the Reichstag election campaign of 1887.

Saxony has very few “Junkers” of the malignant Prussian type . . . The average Saxon Conservative desires . . . abolition of universal suffrage; longer electoral periods; further restrictions on the press; a good muzzle law for the Imperial parliament; a sterner

<sup>76</sup> NRZ, 10.1.77.

<sup>77</sup> *Die sozialen Fragen*, 31.10.78.

<sup>78</sup> Further details and references in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 8.

handling of Social Democracy, and the extension of the repressive law of 1878 to the "freisinnig" [Radical] party; revival of guilds; [and] restriction on the "Golden International" of Jews.<sup>79</sup>

#### FIRST WAVE

The organizational dovetailing of Conservative and antisemitic movements in Saxony mirrored these ideological affinities. From 1878 to 1881, Friesen-Rötha and Frege concentrated their efforts on expanding the party press, fighting Social Democracy, and winning Reichstag elections. By July 1878 the *Neue Reichszeitung* had been propagating antisemitic views in the name of the Saxon Conservative Association for three years. Since January 1876 the *Conservatives Flugblatt für Sachsen* had been doing the same.<sup>80</sup> The *Reichszeitung* offered effusive reviews of books written or speeches delivered by leading antisemites.<sup>81</sup> It reacted immediately to any whiff of compromise with National Liberalism.<sup>82</sup> And it strove to identify German liberalism with Social Democracy. One editorial attacked the liberal press "in the broadest sense of the word, from the strait-laced organs of Berlin privy counselors and stock-exchange matadors down to the Social Democrats' smallest local newsheet in Chemnitz or Crimmitschau."<sup>83</sup>

Anti-socialist excitement in the second half of 1878 provided an opportunity for Saxon Conservatives to vent their anger at universal manhood suffrage, Jews, and Germany's moral and economic decline under the liberal system. These polemics came together in a witches' brew of resentment. The Dresden Conservative Association held its first general assembly shortly after the first assassination attempt on Kaiser Wilhelm I.<sup>84</sup> Its members called for new legislation to combat Social Democracy, but in the same breath they stressed the underlying dangers facing Germany: ill-bred and undisciplined youth, the "hunt for easy money," self-interest, and loss of faith. They also advocated raising the age of enfranchisement for Reichstag elections from twenty-five to thirty. A "lively" debate raised another proposal to impose a tax threshold for Reichstag voters. The Dresdeners were not too shy to strike a five-member committee to recommend a new electoral law for the Reichstag.

Others recognized that the battle could not be won by focusing on Social Democrats alone. Dr. Friedrich Straumer, a leading Conservative in Chemnitz, told his Dresden comrades in mid-December 1878 that "*un-* or even *anti-Christian elements*" were responsible for Germany's woes.<sup>85</sup> Baron von Friesen-Rötha had recently confided similar thoughts in his diary. "A general helplessness . . . has taken hold of the German nation," he wrote. "One now sees that we are standing on the edge of an abyss, with the only effective route to salvation through the moral reform

<sup>79</sup> Strachey, 11.2.87, PRO FO 68/171.

<sup>80</sup> Programmatic articles of 31.1.76, 27.2.76, 26.3.76.

<sup>81</sup> SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1575 (diary entry of 25.11.76).

<sup>82</sup> NRZ, 22.2.76; 3.3.76; 4/6/10.1.77. <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2.8.76.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 10.5.78, 27/28.6.78. <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 17.12.78 (original emphasis).

of our people . . . One heaps all blame onto Social Democracy and . . . herein lies the grave error. All the destructive liberal theories, which are revered by governments and the people—these deserve the blame . . . The Reichstag is to be dissolved, new elections called. Will that bring better elements into the Reichstag? I doubt it. Sharp police measures against Social Democracy are to be enacted . . . Ideas can't be beaten down with the butt-end of a rifle! . . . Yet most people have lost their head out of sheer terror."<sup>86</sup> After the July 1878 elections, Friesen tried to draw lessons from the Social Democrats' success in withstanding the onslaught. Their candidates had been able to win an unexpected number of votes from Saxon farmers and artisans who were "blinded and confused" by National Liberalism. "The Social Democratic agitators knew just how to exploit this mood, in that they completely disavowed the *communistic* tendencies of their party . . . Our teachings were of no avail against these promises."<sup>87</sup>

Friesen thought that a dam against socialism was all the more necessary at this juncture because the Saxon Conservative Party was struggling. Leipzig Conservatives were disinclined to turn out for their regular social gatherings; the *Neue Reichszeitung* was losing money hand over fist; and only about thirty-one local Conservative clubs existed in the whole kingdom.<sup>88</sup> Universal suffrage was blamed again: it had made the voting masses susceptible to "liberal allures and flattery." Friesen claimed that universal suffrage was wholly incompatible with the monarchical principle: they were so "diametrical" in their consequences that eventually "a collision of both forces will logically lead to the extermination of one or the other."

\*

"The day the circus came to town." This was the general tenor of reports describing the arrival of a new kind of antisemitism in Dresden in November 1879.<sup>89</sup> The main event was in Berlin, but by late autumn Dresden was well prepared for the sideshow. Wilhelm Marr's pamphlet on *The Victory of Jewry over Germandom* had appeared in February 1879 and was already in its eighth edition before year's end.<sup>90</sup> Adolf Stöcker had delivered his speech "Our Demands of Modern Jewry" on 19 September.<sup>91</sup> The Prussian Landtag election campaign in October raised the volume of antisemitic rhetoric. All this encouraged Marr to publish as many brochures as he could with titles certain to appeal to liberalism's enemies: *From the Jewish Theater of War; Golden Rats and Red Mice; and Open Your Eyes, German Newspaper Readers!*

<sup>86</sup> Diary entry of 10.6.78, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576.

<sup>87</sup> Diary entry of 25.9.78, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *SVfr.*, 19/26.7.79; cf. *Vaterl.*, 9.12.00, and Friesen's diary for the following; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576.

<sup>89</sup> This section is indebted to PAS, ch. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Marr, *Siege* excerpted as "Wilhelm Marr, *The Victory of Judaism over Germandom* (March 1879)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1797](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1797). Also Zimmermann, "Generations," 99.

<sup>91</sup> Stöcker, *Christlich-Sozial*, 2nd ed., 359–82; excerpted as "Court Preacher Adolf Stöcker Introduces Antisemitism to the Christian Social Workers' Party (19 September 1879)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1798](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1798).



It was a twisted road that led Marr to substitute the term “antisemitic” for the more familiar “anti-Jewish.”<sup>92</sup> Marr’s use of the new term did not signify a clear shift from religious to racial antisemitism, as scholars once argued. The Antisemitic League in Berlin put out propaganda with an unmistakable Christian component; so did Marr’s new journal, the *Deutsche Wacht*. Conversely, as early as 1876 Court Preacher Stöcker had incorporated references to “Jewish blood” into his propaganda. He was perfectly willing to describe Jews in terms of a “tribe” (*Stamm*) or a people (*Volk*)—both terms that were becoming synonymous with “race” in the vocabulary of antisemites. To the dismay of Berlin police trying to monitor all this activity, the battle lines that allegedly fractured the antisemitic movement into religious and racist factions were too blurred to allow them to predict which ones would survive.

Into this fluid situation stepped Alexander Pinkert—an obscure Saxon flower merchant who blamed an earlier business failure on the Jews. Around Easter 1879 Pinkert had circulated a few thousand copies of an *Appeal to the German Nation*. In September 1879 Pinkert published another pamphlet, *On the Jewish Question*, under the pseudonym Egon Waldegg.<sup>93</sup> This work attracted more attention and ran to four editions within two months. Pinkert called on his readers to found a new “Middle- or Burgher-Party,” which he had already characterized as a German Reform Party. This party’s principal goal would be to “drive the adherents of the Semitic race out of the legislative bodies of the German Reich and the individual states.”<sup>94</sup> In the meantime, Otto Glagau had coined the slogan that became the watchword of Conservative antisemitism: “The social question is the Jewish question.” This associative couplet was endorsed by Conservative leaders who wanted to distance themselves from purely racial definitions of the “Jewish question.” But even a racialized Jew appeared to them as a potent symbol of dysfunctional liberalism and un-Christian practices. Linking the social question with the “Jewish question” also appealed to beleaguered members of the lower middle classes. Although these *Mittelständler* knew their economic plight entailed more than the struggle against Judaism, they found Glagau’s simple phrase alluring.

On 1 November 1879 Pinkert launched his Reform Association in Dresden. The packed hall he rented was filled mostly by Social Democrats. The predictable tumult ensued and the meeting was shut down quickly by Dresden police.<sup>95</sup> But curious Dresdeners returned to the next two meetings, on 8 and 23 November. Before an audience of about 400 listeners Marr called for the exclusion of Jews from the military, from German parliaments, and from the courts. By this point the Reform Association had drawn up statutes restricting membership to Christians only. The first issue of the association’s journal, *Deutsche Reform*, was published on 27 December 1879. It reprinted the most famous line from Treitschke’s essay that had appeared in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* a few weeks earlier: “The Jews are our

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Zimmermann, *Marr*, 88–91; ASE, 1:24f.; Volkov, “Antisemitism,” 38f.

<sup>93</sup> Egon Waldegg [pseud. for Alexander Pinkert], *Judenfrage*, 42.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 45.

<sup>95</sup> Franckenstein, 6.12.79, HHStAV, PAV/42.

misfortune.”<sup>96</sup> Free copies were sent to all members of the Saxon upper house and of other German legislatures. By the end of 1880 the print-run of the *Deutsche Reform* was allegedly 4,000 copies.<sup>97</sup>

Pinkert's Reform Association claimed it had the support of Conservatives in the Saxon capital.<sup>98</sup> Such pronouncements were notoriously unreliable, but one observer wrote that Pinkert's Reform Association would be “almost laughable if its efforts were not endorsed from the Conservative side.”<sup>99</sup> Already the movement was generating support, as shown by bills introduced into the Saxon and Prussian Landtage to limit itinerant retailers. The “oppressive competition” of Jews had also fostered calls for limitations on freedom of movement and proposed Reichstag legislation for a stock-exchange tax.

The British envoy George Strachey reported a new political mood in the Saxon capital. Conservatives and radical antisemites were able to span the range of anti-Jewish prejudices exhibited by the lower middle classes, well-to-do businessmen, noble estate owners, and government statesmen. Referring to Marr's antisemitic demands, he reported:

These ideas may be thought amazing. Perhaps they are less so than the fact that in 1879, in the so-called “Elbe-Florence,” a large and intelligent audience listened to them with patience and, apparently, without dissent. The leading Dresden journal [*Dresdner Nachrichten*] reproduced the lecture with seeming approbation, and again denounced with appropriate insults and invectives [Eduard] Lasker, [Gerson von] Bleichröder, [and] the “Golden International” . . .

It is characteristic of German statesmanship that [Interior Minister] Herr von Nostitz-Wallwitz avows a certain sympathy with this movement. He speaks with regret of the good old “ghetto,” or “Jewry” principle, maintained here in full rigor up to the year 1867 [*sic*], which prohibited the residence of Jews in the kingdom except in Dresden and Leipzig. This, said the minister, was an excellent rule; for it prevented those acquisitions of property by Jewish owners which had been found so mischievous elsewhere.<sup>100</sup>

Jewish efforts at self-defense cannot be dismissed. In September 1879 the League of German-Jewish Communities, which has been founded in Leipzig with Emil Lehmann's participation in 1869, launched a libel case against Pinkert and his publisher. In a protest to the Saxon ministry of justice, this League claimed that Pinkert had contravened emancipation legislation passed by Saxony and the North German Confederation in 1868–69.<sup>101</sup> As well as contravening the spirit of Jewish emancipation, Pinkert's pamphlets had allegedly contravened §130 of the Reich Criminal Code. In a decision finally handed down in July 1880, Dresden's public

<sup>96</sup> Treitschke, “Unsere Aussichten,” *Pr/bb* 44, no. 5 (1879): 559–76; Treitschke, *Kämpfe*, 1–28. See “Heinrich von Treitschke Pronounces, ‘The Jews are Our Misfortune’ (15 November 1879),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1799](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1799).

<sup>97</sup> Lexikon, 1:79, and for other details later in this section.

<sup>98</sup> *DR*, 21.2.80, in PAS, 27. Cf. Schmeitzner to Marr, 17.9.80, cited in Brown, *Nietzsche*, 253.

<sup>99</sup> Franckenstein, 20.12.79, HHStAV, PAV/42.

<sup>100</sup> Strachey, 20.12.79 (original emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> Diamant, *Chronik . . . Leipzig*, 113–15.

prosecutor rejected the League's protest. In one of the most remarkable legal pronouncements of this era, the decision stated that Pinkert had made his charges in good faith. Therefore Pinkert's brochure had *not* breached the Criminal Code, nor had it contained specific attacks on the "Mosaic religious community, its institutions, or its traditions." On the contrary: according to this decision, "the teachings of the Talmud . . . were not criticized severely enough."<sup>102</sup> This endorsement of antisemitic teachings by Dresden's public prosecutor had long-term consequences. It increased the number and radicalism of antisemitic works that poured out of Saxon publishing houses in the 1880s. The League of German-Jewish Communities transferred its headquarters from Leipzig to Berlin in 1882. And Jews became less willing to turn to the courts for restitution against even the most outrageous antisemitic pronouncements.

Through 1880 and 1881 Saxony took a back seat to the Reich capital as the Berlin Antisemitism Dispute fired the imagination of Germans. This conflict was ignited by Heinrich von Treitschke and allowed to smolder as antisemites throughout Germany gathered over 225,000 signatures for a petition calling for government action on the "Jewish question."<sup>103</sup> Some of this unprecedented antisemitic activity cast a national spotlight on Saxony, for instance when Stöcker entered the Reichstag contest for 5: Dresden-Old City in 1881. The Conservatives' *Sächsischer Volksfreund* followed these developments closely, as it had in November 1880 when the antisemitic petition was debated on the floor of the Prussian House of Deputies. A contributor wrote that "it is high time for the Jews . . . to adopt the position appropriate to a small minority within a great people. If they take this advice not a hair on their heads will be touched."<sup>104</sup> The *Volksfreund* joined efforts by antisemitic Reformers in Dresden to unseat Emil Lehmann in the Landtag elections of July 1881 and, later, in elections to the Dresden municipal assembly.<sup>105</sup>

This tactic of "marching separately, striking together," was not always successful. When Adolf Stöcker failed to reach the run-off ballot in the Reichstag election of 1881, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* rejoiced that Jew-hatred had crested. This prognosis was too optimistic. One of Wilhelm Liebknecht's banned election pamphlets came closer to the mark. Intentionally conflating "Jew-hatred" and "Jew-baiting" by using the term *Judenhatz*, it charged that members of the "so-called parties of order," not the Social Democrats, were the ones responsible for blood spilled on the campaign trail.<sup>106</sup> As 1881 ended, Dresden antisemites decided to forget the Stöcker disappointment and build on the momentum generated by their Landtag victory over Lehmann five months earlier. They presented a list of twenty-four candidates for the Dresden municipal elections, of whom sixteen were elected. This breakthrough in Dresden provided the foundation for a local antisemitic coalition of German Reformers, Christian Socials, Conservatives, and Dresden's powerful Home-Owners Association.

<sup>102</sup> Diamant, *Chronik . . . Dresden*, 38.

<sup>103</sup> Felix, *Petition*; Boehlich, *Antisemitismusstreit*, 207ff.; Krieger, *Antisemitismusstreit*.

<sup>104</sup> *SVfr*, 27.11.80. <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 13/16.7.81.

<sup>106</sup> SHStAD, KHMS Zwickau, Nr. 2017.

## DOLDRUMS?

During the years 1882 to 1885, Saxon Conservatives found opportunities to liberate themselves from the pro-Bismarckian influence of party chairman Otto von Helldorff-Bedra and pursue their own programmatic priorities. Many, though, were disinclined to strike an independent course: like Frege they were too fearful of invoking the chancellor's displeasure or cutting all ties with National Liberals in the Reichstag. Thus Saxon Conservatism remained divided among more and less governmental wings. Nor was there any state-wide consensus as to how much cooperation with "radical" antisemites was permissible, or in what form. Nevertheless, the inadequacies of party leadership from Berlin contributed to the willingness of Saxon Conservatives to consider new departures. As Helldorff himself observed years later, his loss of a Reichstag seat in 1881 had important consequences for the development of the Conservative Party.<sup>107</sup> He was forced to hand over leadership of the Conservatives' Electoral Association to his arch-rival, Baron Wilhelm von Hammerstein-Schwartow. Hammerstein's power base lay among Christian-Conservative "ultras" in the two houses of the Prussian Landtag and with his editorship of the *Kreuzzeitung*, which became overtly antisemitic. The *Kreuzzeitung* Group, as it came to be called, rallied dissidents who believed the Conservative Party had to be brought "up to date" and put "in touch with the people."<sup>108</sup>

One way the *Kreuzzeitung* Group did this was to launch undifferentiated attacks on what it called the "Gray International"—the liberal-Jewish conspiracy. The term "Gray International" (1881) figured prominently among Paul de Lagarde's *German Writings*, which are said to have helped shape the "Germanic ideology" and the "politics of cultural despair." Not coincidentally, Lagarde fashioned a *Program for the Prussian Conservative Party* in 1884.<sup>109</sup> "Ethos vs. money"<sup>110</sup> was Lagarde's watchword, but it was Friesen's, too.<sup>111</sup> One of Friesen's manuscripts that reached publication in 1886 dwelt *On the Necessity of Cooperation Between Religious and State Authorities in the Social-Ethical Realm*.<sup>112</sup> The reorientation of the German nobility according to Christian Conservative precepts preoccupied both men.<sup>113</sup> Self-described Christian Conservatives also played prominent roles in the Association for the Distribution of Conservative Journals (1883–85),<sup>114</sup> the Association for the People's Welfare (founded 1884), the Association for the Distribution of Good, Popular Literature (founded 1892), and other groups dedicated to

<sup>107</sup> See Retallack, "Parteiführer." <sup>108</sup> Details in Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 4–5.

<sup>109</sup> Lagarde, *Schriften*, 399–414, excerpted as "Paul de Lagarde on Liberalism, Education, and the Jews: *German Writings* (1886)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 3: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1774](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1774). Cf. Lagarde, *Programm*; Sieg, *Prophet*, 203–27; Stern, *Politics*, chs. 1–6.

<sup>110</sup> Sieg, *Prophet*, 217.

<sup>111</sup> SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577, unpublished manuscripts: "Die sittliche Aufgaben der Conservativen-Partei I [sic], II"; "Notwendigkeit der Organisation der konservativen Partei auf sittlichen Grundlage"; and "Ethisch-social"

<sup>112</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Notwendigkeit*.

<sup>113</sup> Lagarde, *Schriften*, 326–33; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577.

<sup>114</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nr. 15589.

broadening the appeal of an explicitly Christian Conservative message. One Saxon variant was the Association for the Distribution of Christian Literature in the Kingdom of Saxony. It published a *Saxon People's Calendar* annually from 1878 into the 1890s.<sup>115</sup>

During the run-up to the Reichstag elections of October 1884, Friesen's distrust of National Liberalism prompted the Prussian envoy Dönhoff and Bismarck to express their disapproval of "ultra-" or "hyper-Conservative" elements within Saxon Conservatism. In their view, such Conservatives were allied with, or at least sympathetic to, Hammerstein's "ultras" in the national party. Bismarck disdained "the political short-sightedness of those hyper-conservative elements which are inclined, on the basis of one-sided and personal viewpoints, to criticize any bill put forward by the government . . . and to stake their claim to independence from the government and their right to follow their own policies." In that direction lay "dangers which cannot be underestimated . . . in Prussia or in the Reich."<sup>116</sup> Bismarck also objected to declarations by Saxon Conservative leaders that they would not forge comprehensive alliances with the Saxon National Liberals at election time. The Conservatives' disappointing showing in the Reichstag elections of autumn 1884 only increased squabbling within the party. In October 1885, German Conservatives, Free Conservatives, the *Kreuzzeitung* Group, and Christian Socials were battling each other "so violently that it almost appears they have nothing in common." The Christian Social Party under Stöcker had "unfortunately not understood how to keep itself free of tainted elements."<sup>117</sup>

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In the middle years of the 1880s, an older and a younger generation of German antisemites vied for leadership of the movement. The same thing occurred in Saxony as the focus of antisemitic activity expanded outward from Dresden to other parts of the kingdom. Two antisemites who would play a decisive role in Saxon Conservative affairs offered prescriptions for revitalizing the movement in 1885 and both centered their activities in Leipzig. One of them offered the slogan "new times, new parties." The other argued just as vehemently that the antisemitic movement could succeed only in cooperation with Saxon Conservatives. These men were Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg and Theodor Fritsch (see Figure 5.5.) They complemented each other perfectly. Liebermann was the unscrupulous orator with the booming voice who cared nothing for ideology, just power. Fritsch was the tireless organizer who always worked the middle ground but, in fact, was the more fanatic of the two. Over the next two decades, despite brief periods of antagonism, *both* men found they could work hand in glove with Saxon Conservatives.

<sup>115</sup> *Sächsischer Volkskalender 1881/1885/1892* (Dresden): its alleged circulation in 1885 was 35,000.

<sup>116</sup> [Bismarck] to Dönhoff, 7.4.83 (draft), responding to his report of 24.3.83, PAAAB, Sachsen 50, Bd. 1.

<sup>117</sup> Saxon envoy to Prussia, Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen (Berlin), to MdAA Fabrice, 26.10.85, SHStAD, MdAA 3295.

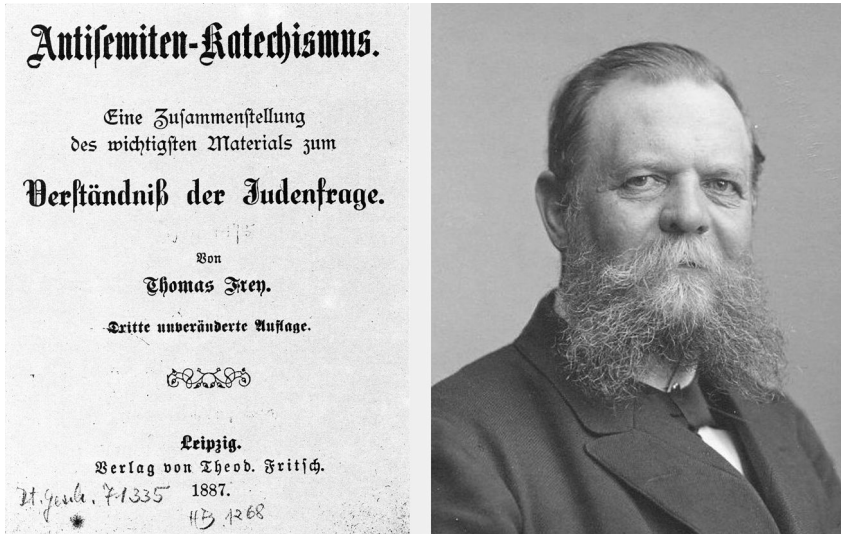


Figure 5.5. *Antisemitic Catechism*, published by Theodor Fritsch under the pseudonym Thomas Frey, and Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg.

Sources: *Antisemiten-Katechismus* image from the author's collection; LeMO Lebendiges Museum Online, <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/biografie/max-sonnenberg>.

One of the signatories to the antisemitic petition that reached the Reich chancellery in April 1881—where it was ignored by Bismarck—was the Chemnitz publisher Ernst Schmeitzner.<sup>118</sup> He counted Friedrich Nietzsche and Wilhelm Marr among his authors.<sup>119</sup> Schmeitzner founded a German Reform Association in Chemnitz. With about 200 members, it was the second largest Reform Association in Saxony. Soon it was also the second largest political club in Chemnitz after the Conservative Association. Therein lay the rub. The literary-philosophical pretensions of *Schmeitzner's Internationale Monatsschrift* could not disguise its antipathy to Christian Conservatism. Contributions from Eugen Dühring and Bruno Bauer stressed racial definitions of the “Jewish question,” and the journal’s sympathy for the established political parties decreased correspondingly.<sup>120</sup>

The “big event” of 1882 soon attracted Schmeitzner’s undivided attention: the First International Anti-Jewish Congress, held in Dresden on 11–12 September. The key figures behind this “congress” were Pinkert, Schmeitzner, and the Bavarian Baron von Fechenbach, but the 200 attendees represented a *Who’s Who* of Central European antisemites.<sup>121</sup> With great fanfare the speeches were published under the title *Manifesto to the Governments and Peoples of Christian States Endangered*

<sup>118</sup> BAP, Rkz 679; *Schmeitzner's Internationale Monatsschrift (SIM)* was read in the SLUB.

<sup>119</sup> Schmeitzner–Marr correspondence (1880) in Brown, *Nietzsche*, 249–52.

<sup>120</sup> See e.g. E[ugen] Dühring, *SIM* 1, no. 7 (1882): 401–21.

<sup>121</sup> *DR*, 12/13.9.82 ff.; Zumbini, *Wurzeln*, 258–62; PAS, 42–6; materials in the NL and Sg. Fechenbach (BAK) and the NL Ströcker (ZStAM, GStAM, GStAB) cover both antisemitic congresses.

by Jewry.<sup>122</sup> Over 45,000 copies of this *Manifesto* were distributed in the original German and in Russian, Czech, and Hungarian translations. Insofar as it sought to unite the anti-Jewish movement doctrinally, coordinate it internationally, and give it momentum, the congress failed miserably. Throughout the meeting Stöcker tried to keep the “pure” racists in check, with little success. The resolution issued at the end of the congress documented the antisemites’ tortured efforts to steer a course between the groups pushing their movement in different directions, referring to Jews as a tribe and a race but describing the “Jewish question” as a “cultural-historical, political, social-political, and moral-religious” one.<sup>123</sup>

After the congress, Schmeitzner did not let the chimera of an international antisemitic movement go gently. The First Anti-Jewish Congress established a “standing committee” to sustain public attention and collect donations. As early as December 1882 Schmeitzner was growing disheartened by others’ lack of interest.<sup>124</sup> He then engineered the founding of the “General Union to Combat the Jews (Alliance antijuive universelle)” in Chemnitz on 5 February 1883. By that point he and Pinkert were at each other’s throat.<sup>125</sup> This wrangle contributed to the fiasco that Schmeitzner suffered with his Second Anti-Jewish Congress, held in Chemnitz on 26–27 April 1883.<sup>126</sup> The gathering attracted only about thirty-five participants. One Jewish newspaper hit the mark when it declared “the rats are leaving the sinking ship.”<sup>127</sup> Thereafter Schmeitzner’s star faded rapidly. His *Internationale Monatsschrift* folded suddenly in December 1883. He had discovered how difficult it was to steer between conservative and “radical” antisemites: as he wrote to Nietzsche, “My, what strange company I’ve fallen in with!”<sup>128</sup>

In Leipzig the antisemitic movement was shaped during these years in ways that remain murky largely because of the central role played by Theodor Fritsch. Born the son of a poor farming family in Prussian Saxony in 1852, Fritsch is one of relatively few forerunners acknowledged by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis before he died in 1933.<sup>129</sup> After the 1912 Reichstag elections, which brought 110 “reds” into parliament, Fritsch called openly for “a holy Fehme of dedicated men” to murder the leaders of the revolutionary movement.<sup>130</sup> No history of Germany’s *völkisch* movement would be complete without Fritsch. Much less well known is his crucial role, through Saxony’s *Mittelstand* movement after

<sup>122</sup> “‘Manifesto to the Governments and Peoples of the Christian Nations Threatened by Judaism’: The First Anti-Jewish Congress in Dresden (11–12 September 1882),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 4: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=581](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=581).

<sup>123</sup> *Manifest*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Police report, 30.12.82, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nr. 15226.

<sup>125</sup> Reports in BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nr. 15226; Liebermann, *Beiträge*; Brown, *Nietzsche*, 254f.

<sup>126</sup> *SIM* 2, no. 5 (May 1883): 255–322; Liebermann, *Beiträge*, 146–201.

<sup>127</sup> *Die jüdische Presse* 14, no. 18 (3.5.83).

<sup>128</sup> Schmeitzner to Nietzsche, Sept. 1883, in Brown, *Nietzsche*, 244.

<sup>129</sup> The best source is now Zumbini, *Wurzeln*, 321–422. Cf. Phelps, “Fritsch”; Zimmermann, “Generations”; and Fritsch’s own handbooks, brochures, newspapers, and journals.

<sup>130</sup> Cited in ASE, 1:250; Levy, *Antisemitism*, 191.

1900, in giving lower-middle-class voters a reason to vote for Conservative candidates.<sup>131</sup>

After he moved to Leipzig in 1878, Fritsch founded the first of many interest groups that claimed to champion the cause of the little man—in this case small-scale millers. With income generated by these enterprises he was able to play a leading role in the early histories of antisemitic clubs in Dresden, Chemnitz, and Leipzig. But “leading role” is a misnomer. Fritsch was famously unable to speak before an audience.<sup>132</sup> This lack helps explain Fritsch’s conspiratorial leanings, his antipathy to parliamentary methods, and his reliance on the written word. Fritsch looked to Wilhelm Marr for inspiration, but he refused to accept Marr’s pessimism and resignation. Instead he kept a finger in every pie. With the racists he agreed that the “true source of popular misery” was the “blood sucked from the people’s body” by the Jews. With those who framed the “Jewish Question” in purely Christian terms he labeled Jews the “apostles of lies” and “the devil’s truest children.”<sup>133</sup> With Conservative *Mittelständler* he declared that the “Jewish Question” was above all economic. It has been said that in the realm of high politics, rhetoric should be weaponized sparingly; but when Fritsch wanted to explain the essence of the Jewish “threat” and why it could be eliminated through propaganda, he preferred brutal metaphors. The Jews were the “sum of all vices” and “the root of all evil.” These sound like simple credos, but for Fritsch they provided a political strategy. Jew-hatred needed no complicated explanations. The “Jewish question,” he wrote once, was “a festering abscess” that had to be “cut open”<sup>134</sup>—a goal best served by the “naked language of violence.”<sup>135</sup>

If innuendo offered Fritsch nothing of value, innovation became his mantra. He reinvented himself constantly. His *Kleines Mühlenjournal* was a monthly intended for mill owners but it served as his cash cow.<sup>136</sup> To protect the reputation of this journal and of the Millers’ Technical Bureau he maintained in Leipzig, Fritsch used the pseudonyms Thomas Frey, Fritz Thor, and F. Roderich-Stoltheim for his antisemitic writing. As “Frey” he edited a series of brochures from the end of 1881 onward that seemed to channel Friedrich Nietzsche. Fritsch promised readers of his *Leuchtkugeln*—“Old-German-antisemitic aphorisms”—a convenient way to avoid thorny questions of definition.<sup>137</sup> In 1883 he launched a new series, *Brennende Fragen*.<sup>138</sup> These short essays, intended only to achieve agitational effect, were described by Fritsch himself as a “middle way between newspaper and brochure.”<sup>139</sup> Read by only a few hundred subscribers at most, they offered a more extreme antisemitic world-view than Fritsch’s previous writings.

<sup>131</sup> An early acknowledgment of this role was Stegmann, “Neokonservatismus”; cf. Zumbini, *Wurzeln*. Older views in Nipperdey, *Geschichte*, 2:299; cf. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 3:931; Levy, *Downfall*, 37ff., 160ff.

<sup>132</sup> Levy, *Downfall*, 38. For the following, ASE, 1:249f.; Levy, *Antisemitism*, 190f.

<sup>133</sup> AC no. 4 (Mar. 1886): 2.

<sup>134</sup> SIM 2, no. 10 (Oct. 1883): 622–5; PAS, 55f.

<sup>135</sup> Zumbini, *Wurzeln*, 330.

<sup>136</sup> Cited in PAS, 55.

<sup>137</sup> *Leuchtkugeln. Altddeutsch-antisemitische Kernsprüche* (Leipzig, 1881–2).

<sup>138</sup> *Brennende Fragen. Nationale Flugblätter zur Erweckung des deutsche Volksbewußtseins* (Leipzig, 1883ff.).

<sup>139</sup> AC no. 7 (Sept. 1886): 6.



In 1885 Fritsch took over Schmeitzner's publishing list as well as that of Otto Hentze, the Berlin publisher of Marr's *Deutsche Wacht* and many other antisemitic tracts.<sup>140</sup> The most important product of this coup was the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*, which evolved into the *Deutsch-Soziale Blätter* in April 1890. The circular announcing this new enterprise was sent to only Fritsch's closest associates in September 1885.<sup>141</sup> The whiff of conspiracy contributed to Fritsch's success. New issues appeared irregularly and were labeled "discreet," only for "trustworthy party comrades." No more than about 1,500 copies of the first issue were printed. But the second, appearing in December 1885, was sent to some 5,000 "fellow travelers." The Nazis themselves acknowledged the importance of the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*. It represented a generational sea-change. A letter Theodor Fritsch sent to "the old man" Marr in July 1885 pulled no punches in suggesting that the "founding fathers" of the movement had nothing more to offer.

Externally [wrote Fritsch], antisemitism (or at least antisemites) is going increasingly bankrupt. Stöcker is wiped out; the *Volkszeitung* has been closed, and along with it Liebermann has vanished from the scene for the present; [the entire movement] wants to emigrate . . . Schmeitzner has gone into the lighting business . . . ; Pinkert apparently cannot hold on, Glagau's *Kulturkämpfer* appears irregularly . . . It's possible that one day I may remain the only antisemite.<sup>142</sup>

Fritsch's ability to rethink fundamental aspects of mass politics deserves our attention even without Hitler's endorsement. Yet early in their careers both men were eager to identify the deficiencies of the radical nationalist Right in Germany. In 1885–86 Fritsch used the *Antisemitische Correspondenz* to ask why antisemitic agitation and propaganda were not yet reaching the masses.<sup>143</sup> He offered more than discussion. Like the Nazis, Fritsch used the principle of self-correcting entrepreneurship to give the public only what it would pay for.<sup>144</sup> In one of his letters to Marr, Fritsch explained that he had no intention of following Schmeitzner's "*begging principle*." "The collecting of money on behalf of Schmeitzner and Co. contributed very much to the discrediting of antisemitism . . . There must be '*profit*'! . . . The Jewish problem is solved when you find the 'trick'—not a moment before."<sup>145</sup>

Fritsch's letters to Marr reveal that propaganda constituted a *sine qua non* for his success—as it did for Hitler. Both of them needed to convince "the great stupid masses."<sup>146</sup> But Fritsch's activities were not limited to publishing. The multiple roles he played in Leipzig's associational life were also important. The *Antisemitische*

<sup>140</sup> Fritsch to Marr, 19.5.85, in Zimmermann, "Generations," 94; Brown, *Nietzsche*, 273; PAS, 62.

<sup>141</sup> AC no. 1 (Oct. 1885): 1f.

<sup>142</sup> Staatsarchiv Hamburg, NL Marr, Bestand A, Nr. 67, Fritsch to Marr, 1.7.85; translation from Zimmermann, *Marr*, 99.

<sup>143</sup> See Zimmermann, "Generations," 97. <sup>144</sup> ASE, 1:250.

<sup>145</sup> Fritsch to Marr, 8.5.84, in Zimmermann, "Generations," 95 (original emphases). This and other letters excerpted as "Theodor Fritsch to Wilhelm Marr on New Tactics for the Struggle against the Jews (1884–85)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1847](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1847).

<sup>146</sup> Fritsch to Marr, 12.11.85, in Zimmermann, "Generations," 98.

*Correspondenz*, which allegedly had a circulation of 2,000 by mid-1888,<sup>147</sup> was the product of the German Reform Association in Leipzig. The same is true of the weekly discussion evenings that Fritsch helped organize as part of the Reform Association's program and the establishment of an Antisemitic Reading Room available to members. According to Fritsch, these institutions would help train antisemitic speakers who were quick-witted and committed enough to enter any battle they faced.<sup>148</sup> It was for such fighters that Fritsch produced his first *Antisemitic Catechism* in February 1887 (see Figure 5.5). Eventually published under the title *Handbook of the Jewish Question*, this primer went through forty-four editions by 1944 and still represents a "classic" of *völkisch* literature.

In January 1885 the Leipzig Reform Association counted only eighty members. In February its membership stood at 142.<sup>149</sup> This increase can be attributed not only to Fritsch's efforts but to those of Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg, who was born in the revolutionary year of 1848. On 23 January 1885 Liebermann addressed the Leipzig association on the theme of "New Times, New Parties."<sup>150</sup> About 1,000 listeners were in attendance. As chairman of the meeting, Fritsch kept a lid on things for a time but eventually scuffles broke out; subsequent press coverage generated new interest; and a counter-organization was founded by local defenders of the Jews. Less predictable at this point was the trajectory of Liebermann's own career. Was he a radical or a moderate?

He was both—by turns. His message was compatible with the views of Saxon Conservatives who endorsed racial antisemitism if it was paired with more orthodox views endorsing religion, monarchy, and *Ordnung*. His cautious approach, his counsels of moderation to antisemitic hotspurs, and his ambition to play a role in Conservative Party affairs were also welcomed on the "establishment" Right. Nevertheless, Liebermann shared Stöcker's talent for moving an audience with the spoken word. He could organize and energize meetings that broke the limits of scale imposed by the politics of notables.<sup>151</sup> Liebermann was also willing to use the same anti-Conservative arguments that would soon prove so important for Otto Böckel in Hessen. Those Conservatives who did not approve of antisemitic "sedition," he declared in 1883, were "fear-ridden, spineless, and incapable of making sacrifices"<sup>152</sup>

Liebermann stood at a crossroads in 1885 after his German People's Association project in Berlin collapsed. He announced his intention to join Bernhard Förster in Paraguay.<sup>153</sup> Liebermann's farewell party had already been organized by his followers when he was unexpectedly invited to Leipzig by Fritsch and offered employment on the editorial staff of the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*. By early 1886 Liebermann had been named honorary chairman of the Leipzig Reform Association, and by mid-year police spies reported plans to found a "general

<sup>147</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 8679.

<sup>148</sup> DR, 5.7.84, 7.11.84, cited in PAS, 59.

<sup>149</sup> DR, 28.1.85, 10.2.85, cited in PAS, 60f.

<sup>150</sup> Liebermann von Sonnenberg, *Neue Zeiten*; idem, *Beiträge*, 286ff.

<sup>151</sup> Liebermann von Sonnenberg, *Beiträge*, 308.

<sup>152</sup> At the 2nd Anti-Jewish Congress in Chemnitz, 1883, cited in "Alliance."

<sup>153</sup> Liebermann von Sonnenberg, *Beiträge*, I–IV.

German antisemitic union." Its home would be in Dresden or Leipzig: Saxony's association law was allegedly more liberal than Prussia's.<sup>154</sup> Liebermann's "von" may have contributed to the comment in one such report that the current leaders of the local antisemitic movement included "highly regarded and reputable burghers of Leipzig." By March 1889 his leadership drew the credit for increased antisemitic activity in Berlin and elsewhere.<sup>155</sup>

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Shifting the focus to Dresden brings us to the strange case of Gustav Emil Leberecht Hartwig. Many details of Hartwig's chequered career remain cloaked in obscurity, but he became a lightning rod for Conservative-antisemitic tension in Saxony—albeit one whose raw energy could not easily be dissipated. Before arriving in Dresden as a master builder, Hartwig plied his trade in Roßwein and Meißen. As a Conservative backbencher he sat in the lower house of the Saxon Landtag from 1873 to 1879.<sup>156</sup> Hartwig's star rose swiftly during the municipal election campaign in Dresden in 1881 as a consequence of rising tax burdens associated both with Germany's new tariff policy and Saxony's income- and property tax. His political bandwagon was a local tax revolt. Despite the highly charged language he used, Hartwig's "revolt" actually called for all the "reforms" that Conservative antisemites had been advocating since the mid-1870s. These included opposition to "bankrupt" liberal economics, Jewish "domination" of the press, and, not least, misdemeanour in high places. Dresden's powerful Home-Owners Association, together with the antisemitic Reform Associations and Christian Social Associations, provided the organizational backing Hartwig needed to penetrate the staid atmosphere of municipal council meetings. Armed with an insider's knowledge of the construction trade and copious statistics, Hartwig accused Dresden's city council and its mayor (Paul Stübel) with multiple counts of financial mismanagement. The imprudent or improper allocation of city contracts, the inaccurate or unfair assessment of property taxes, the unnecessary or untimely expropriation of lands needed for expansion at inflated prices, the disruptive or deleterious stewardship of annual budgets through debate—these issues served Hartwig well in his effort to put an end to "business as usual." For good measure, Hartwig and Pinkert's *Deutsche Reform* attacked Stübel because he had taken part in a fundraising campaign in aid of Jewish victims of the 1881 pogroms in Tsarist Russia.<sup>157</sup>

The Conservatives' ambivalence toward Hartwig and his "demagogic" antisemitism was apparent during the Reichstag campaign in 5: Dresden-Old City in October 1884. The Conservatives tried to undercut Hartwig's campaign in order to secure the election of their candidate, Kurt von Einsiedel, formerly regional governor of Dresden. They mobilized the civil service; they condemned Hartwig

<sup>154</sup> Police reports in BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 8679.

<sup>155</sup> BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 8679.

<sup>156</sup> Details below from Otto Richter, *Geschichte*, 84f.; Rackwitz, "Biographischer Anhang," 39f.; Dittrich, *Almanach* 1878, 143; *SParl*, 253, 388; PAS, 38, 48–53.

<sup>157</sup> *DR*, 18.5.82, cited in PAS, 40.

for destroying anti-socialist unity; and they spread the rumor that 2,000 trustworthy socialists had been “commanded” to vote for Hartwig on the first ballot so that August Bebel would face Einsiedel in the second round. Things didn’t work out as planned. The balloting on 29 October was close. Einsiedel placed third, with 7,054 votes to Hartwig’s 7,567 and Bebel’s 8,620. Without commentary the Conservatives shifted their support to Hartwig for the run-off on 11 November. But they were desperately afraid that Hartwig’s dubious reputation, his rabble-rousing style, and the embarrassment he had caused the Dresden city council would prevent many Conservatives from voting in the second round. In the end, Hartwig carried the day, winning the second ballot by a comfortable margin of more than 2,500 votes.<sup>158</sup> In celebrating their greatest show of strength since 1879, the Reformers rubbed salt in the Conservatives’ wounds by claiming they had elected Hartwig despite the Conservatives’ determined opposition. Dresden insiders knew this was nonsense. “It seems to me,” wrote one of them, that “the line which divides the Conservatives from the antisemites is a very fine one.”<sup>159</sup> Another registered his frustration that a single anti-socialist candidate could have beaten Bebel with a majority of about 6,000 votes in the first round. Hartwig and Einsiedel had split the non-socialist vote needlessly, “with the exact same program.”<sup>160</sup>

Hartwig’s charges against the comfortable Dresden establishment resonated in city hall, but they echoed through the streets of Dresden too. There, strict legality and accepted parliamentary practice mattered little to citizens eager to hear sensational charges of graft and bribery. Hartwig helped unseat the last Jewish member of Dresden’s assembly, Emil Lehmann, in 1883. The lack of any significant outcry at the time demonstrated to the Conservatives that there was little risk in unfurling a campaign to deny Jews political representation in the Saxon capital. As the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* put it, Saxon Conservatives would not let the antisemites in “through the front door . . . but happily through the back door.”<sup>161</sup> After political decorum returned to municipal politics in the 1890s, no one could deny that Hartwig and his “social reform” backers had secured a power base for themselves that was unequalled in other German cities. The antisemitic coalition of Conservatives and Reformers dominated Dresden politics until the dawn of the new century. Its voice was heard when the Saxon king, his ministers, or Landtag deputies debated Jewish policy. When the *Dresdner Nachrichten* declared in 1890 that steady grain prices were threatened “by ‘rings’ of radical Jews,” the British envoy Strachey noted that “as far as I can judge, this political economy is generally accepted as sound.”<sup>162</sup>

Thus, at the end of the 1880s, relations between Conservatives and antisemites in Dresden exhibited the same push–pull tendencies as at the beginning of the decade. Liebermann von Sonnenberg was advocating “greater reliance on the ‘most antisemitic’

<sup>158</sup> Hartwig won 13,793 votes to Bebel’s 11,106; SHStAD, Mdl 5381.

<sup>159</sup> Strachey, 12.11.84; PRO 68/168.

<sup>160</sup> Dönhoff, 5.11.84, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 13; cf. Strachey, 29.10.84, 12.11.84, PRO 68/168; Rudhart, 5.11.84, BHStAM II, MA 2853; Austrian envoy Herbert-Rathkeal, 12.11.84, HHStAV, PAV/43.

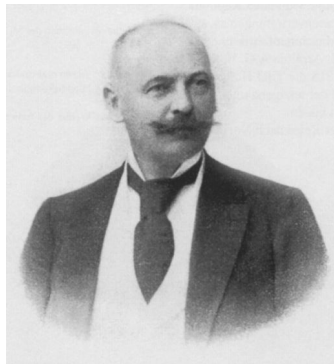
<sup>161</sup> *AZ*, 25.9.83, cited in PAS, 48.

<sup>162</sup> Strachey, 7.2.90, PRO, FO 68/175.

of the regular parties, the German Conservative Party.”<sup>163</sup> He no longer preached the gospel of “new times, new parties.” What had changed? One answer is that 1885 was the year Dresden’s local Conservative Association came under the leadership of the man who was later anointed “Paul I” and “the uncrowned king of Saxony.”

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Dr. Paul Mehnert did not spring from humble beginnings (see Figure 5.6).<sup>164</sup> Born in 1852, he was the son of Karl Mehnert, who owned the knight’s estate Klösterlein (near Aue) and who served as the founding director of the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association. Paul studied law at the universities of Leipzig and Bonn from 1873 to 1876. After receiving his doctorate he served as a clerk with various district courts and in a Dresden law practice. In the midst of July 1878’s anti-socialist hysteria he joined the law practice of the man who had recently become his father-in-law: Gustav Ackermann. But from 1882 to 1899 he was a lawyer in name only; he did not practice. In the meantime he had become a member of the directorate of his father’s agricultural credit association and he took over as full director in 1885—a post he filled until he died in July 1922. Mehnert’s credentials as a millionaire landowner landed him among the German power-brokers profiled by the liberal critic Rudolf Martin in 1910. At that time Mehnert’s net worth was estimated at 1.2 million Marks; his annual income was approximately 140,000 Marks. Upon his father’s death in 1885 Mehnert inherited the estates of Klösterlein and Medingen, amounting to 210 hectares: the latter estate, not far from Dresden, was his residence from 1894 to 1921. In 1909, already bearing the title *Hofrat* like his father-in-law Ackermann, Mehnert was given the estate Drehbach bei Wilkenstein, as well as the title *Exzellenz*, by King Friedrich August III.<sup>165</sup>



**Figure 5.6.** Dr. jur. Paul Mehnert (1852–1922).

Source: Josef Matzerath, *Aspekte sächsischer Landtagsgeschichte. Präsidenten und Abgeordnete von 1833 bis 1952* (Dresden, 2001), 77.

<sup>163</sup> Levy, *Downfall*, 38f.

<sup>164</sup> Obituaries in *DN* and *DTZ*, 19.7.22; cf. *SParl*, 89, 425f.; Martin, *Machthaber*, 517–19.

<sup>165</sup> *Wirklicher Geheimer Rat mit dem Prädikat Exzellenz*.

Such connections and titles were indispensable to a man who epitomized the political “all-rounder”

Mehnert the businessman? That was a legitimate label too. The Medingen estate, like so many in Saxony, had a distillery, a saw-mill, and a grist-mill on its grounds. Since the total mortgages and other debts held by the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association exceeded the annual budget of the entire Saxon state, Mehnert’s role was essentially the head of a very large and powerful lending bank.<sup>166</sup> Like Arnold Frege in the 1870s, Mehnert became Saxony’s most important representative on various agricultural associations and councils after the turn of the century. It was a seamless network of connections that carried his influence from the agricultural credit associations and local government councils in Medingen, Dresden, Meissen, and the Erzgebirge to the executive organs of Germany’s two leading agricultural councils.<sup>167</sup> From the mid-1890s onward he was also *de facto* leader of Saxon Conservatives, having joined the executive of the Saxon Conservative Association in 1889.

Before Mehnert became its chairman, the Dresden Conservative Association still resembled an old-style political club. In the year ending March 1880 there had been only four general discussion evenings but twenty-three meetings of the executive.<sup>168</sup> Membership stood at 760; by the end of the decade it had roughly doubled.<sup>169</sup> In the 1870s Mehnert was too young to be regarded as the father of Saxony’s anti-socialist Kartell, but by 1890 he had adopted the child as his own. Whether as leader of Dresden Conservatives, chair of Saxony’s Conservative State Association, or as its representative on the national party’s Committee of Twelve, Mehnert was one of the most tactically skilled and hard-headed politicians of his day—not unlike his counterpart, Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa, the “uncrowned king of Prussia.”

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In the 1880s Mehnert faced a two-sided question: What to do with the Jews? And what to do with the independent antisemites? To answer one question without addressing the other was not an option. The choices Conservatives made in Dresden differed from those made in Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Saxony’s hinterland. Yet, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* in 1884 called Dresden the “breeding ground” of antisemitism in Germany.<sup>170</sup> By the end of 1884 Dresden’s antisemitic Reform Association had over 800 members.<sup>171</sup> Hence Mehnert’s role as chairman of Dresden’s Conservative Association was pivotal to bringing Pinkert, Liebermann, and Fritsch within the party’s orbit. Mehnert did not always find it easy to distance himself both from the Jews and from “Jew-baiters.” For example: rumors swirled early in the 1880s that his father had made his fortune by

<sup>166</sup> In Dec. 1866 the LWSKVS numbered 3,000 members, by Dec. 1890, 11,731. LWSKVS, 25 Jahre, 6, 13; SVf, 8.6.81.

<sup>167</sup> *Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrat* (1902–22) and *Landeskulturrat* (1899–1922).

<sup>168</sup> SVf, 20.3.80; 18.10.79; 4.10.79.

<sup>169</sup> Mehnert to Friesen-Rötha, 19.5.88, reporting 1,386 members; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 273.

<sup>170</sup> AZJ, 18.11.84, in PAS, 51.

<sup>171</sup> DR, 9.11.84, in PAS, 51.

usury.<sup>172</sup> The rumor had legs—for a time—because both father and son preferred to work out of sight, behind the scenes. In the late 1870s the younger Mehnert had already published works on stock-exchange and credit questions. These made clear his debt to Franz Perrot, Otto Glagau, Carl Wilmanns, and other antisemites.<sup>173</sup> But the case for including Paul Mehnert among Saxony's leading antisemites is sealed when we consider a speech he delivered to the Dresden Conservative Association on 17 February 1880.

Mehnert might have surmised that his announced address on "The Origins and Aims of the Anti-Jewish Reform Movement and its Significance, from the Conservative Standpoint" would appear on the back pages of the *Sächsischer Volksfreund* under "associational news."<sup>174</sup> He was uncharacteristically candid in making the following points: The French Revolution had helped German Jews begin their rise to influence and power. Sweden and Norway severely limited the rights of Jews whereas Germany had allowed "Semitism" to become a "moneyed power" in its own right. The Jewish press dared to report "in the most malicious way" about the associational life of Christians: it was striving to control public opinion across the board. And it was wrong to speak of Jew-baiting in present circumstances: "one could better speak of Christian-baiting."

Mehnert outlined the competing aims pursued by the new breed of antisemites. But instead of developing this point he drew his audience's attention to a Society for the Eradication of the Jews in the United States. After claiming that this "society" sought to relocate all American Jews to Jerusalem, Mehnert "cited a unanimous resolution passed by this society which culminated in the demand for the complete extermination of the Jews." At this point Mehnert again shifted gears, turning to Pinkert's local Reform Association. Its demands agreed "on many essential points with those of the Conservative Party." Examples included calls for a stock-exchange tax, the demand for cash payments from Jews in business dealings, and other measures to address the "faulty economy of credit." As Mehnert moved to his summation, he invoked a martial metaphor that he hoped would explain why independent antisemitic parties were not needed. "Marching separately, striking together" was not the only formula for victory. Germany's "lofty mission to be the peace-loving power of the civilized world . . . [could] not lie with the creation of new regiments alone but [had to] be premised on the reawakening of Christian belief among the German people."

Virtually every major statement from a leading Saxon Conservative between 1880 and 1895—whether in print, on the hustings, or in a parliamentary chamber—offered variations on Mehnert's speech of 17 February 1880. Recognizing the "good kernel" in German antisemitism; reworking age-old myths to sharpen the Conservative message or blunt rivals' barbs; coquetting with the spectre of physical violence; blaming the Jews for having achieved "dominance" of the press

<sup>172</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping [1880] and memo [29.5.1883], BAP, Rkz 679; PAS, 52f.; Dönhoff, 27.9.85, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 14.

<sup>173</sup> Mehnert, *Wesen*, 1; Mehnert, *Actienwesen*.

<sup>174</sup> For the following, *SVf*, 21.2.80.

and public opinion; calling on Christians to reaffirm their faith; linking the Jews with socialist revolution and dysfunctional liberal economics; above all reaffirming the Conservative Party's claim to have defended the "rights of Christians" longer and more diligently than any other party—these constituted the unchanging framework within which Conservatives moved in and out of sympathy with other antisemites for the next decade and a half. In the latter half of the 1880s Baron von Friesen-Rötha asserted the Conservative Party's independence from the radical antisemites. But like Mehnert, he never conceded that his own party was insincere or insufficiently engaged in the struggle against the Jews. Fresh recruits were needed in the Conservative army; "new regiments" were not.

## FELLOW TRAVELERS II

From 1886 to 1889 Baron von Friesen-Rötha's attention remained focused on his party's effort to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate forms of anti-semitism. As head of Saxon Conservatives he had many other tasks, almost all of which were made more difficult when he had to travel to Berlin to represent 7: Meissen in the Reichstag of 1887–90. Friesen was regarded by some in his own party—and in Berlin—as an overenthusiastic scribbler, a loose cannon: his "lust for battle sometimes drives him in extreme directions."<sup>175</sup> Yet he steered his party on a relatively steady path during these years, avoiding political shipwreck. Of the shoals he avoided, three were particularly hazardous. The first required Friesen to honor the Saxon Kartell with the National Liberals yet resist pressures for Conservatives and National Liberals to amalgamate into a *Mittelpartei*—the single pliant party that Bismarck had been seeking since the mid-1870s. The second required Friesen to retain his regional party's influence in the inner councils of the national Conservative Party by refusing to commit itself unequivocally to either Otto von Helldorff, who represented governmental, "opportunistic" Conservatism, or to Wilhelm von Hammerstein and members of the *Kreuzzeitung* Group, who by 1888 were intriguing against Bismarck and Helldorff. The third danger zone was the Jewish question. If Friesen offered either a sweeping endorsement or a sweeping repudiation of antisemitism without differentiating among different aims, methods, and leadership styles, he knew his party stood to lose the allegiance of sympathetic members or potential recruits in one camp or the other. He therefore continued to insist that only Conservatives offered voters and other Germans the "proper" brand of antisemitism to meet the "Jewish threat."

The electoral success of Bismarck's Kartell in the Reichstag elections of February 1887 had put Saxony on the map. A contributor to the Saxon Conservatives' new flagship newspaper, *Das Vaterland*, reminded readers in 1889 that Wilhelm II had singled out the Saxon envoy to Prussia for a prestigious decoration because Saxony had not sent a single Social Democrat to the Reichstag in February 1887. And as Bernhard Strödel wrote to Friesen after the elections, his own and Karl Biedermann's

<sup>175</sup> Dönhoff, 6.4.87, PAAAB, Sachsen 50, Bd. 2.



understanding of the Kartell was that its value would be demonstrated only after it was invoked in two successive Reichstag elections (as well as in the Landtag elections of 1887 and 1889). "We agreed to proceed as dictatorially as possible," wrote Strödel, "that is, not to negotiate too much with the individual coteries in the countryside and, as soon as the elections are officially announced, to issue separate manifestos, which, however, will have similar content. We were both in complete agreement that the Kartell must be maintained under all circumstances at least until the next Reichstag elections, in order thereby to eliminate the Progressives and the Social Democrats once and for all."<sup>176</sup> In Landtag election campaigns, Saxon Conservative leaders allowed local clubs more latitude, but the principle of Kartell solidarity was not seriously compromised. After the Landtag election campaign in the autumn of 1887, Strödel wrote with obvious satisfaction that although August Bebel's election was unavoidable, the Conservatives' election plan had "succeeded brilliantly": Wilhelm Liebknecht had been driven out of the Landtag "and I certainly cannot complain about our Kartell brothers."<sup>177</sup>

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Germany's antisemitic movement became more protean and more radical after 1886. Saxon antisemites yielded headlines to such men as Ludwig Werner in Kassel and Otto Böckel in Hessen,<sup>178</sup> who offered an anti-Junker, anti-Conservative message. To counter such claims, Theodor Fritsch and Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg began to argue more vehemently that their goal was to inject anti-semitism into all existing parties, above all the Conservative Party. As Fritsch put it, a "nothing-but-antisemitism party" was a non-starter: instead antisemites should seek followers in all existing parties. To this end, Fritsch proposed an "indirect program" when forty-three antisemites met in Kassel on 13–14 June 1886. The result was the founding of a General German Antisemitic Union. Fritsch believed that the new union might hold the seed of "a future great German-national party."<sup>179</sup> He also refocused his efforts on distributing antisemitic propaganda as widely as possible. Doing so in no way prevented him from helping the Conservative cause in Saxony, which he supported during the Reichstag election campaign of January–February 1887 with a massive propaganda blitz. Around Christmas 1886 a flyer entitled *Don't Buy from Jews* "almost flooded" Saxon households. Some 30,000 copies of a Fritsch pamphlet were distributed within a two-week period in Chemnitz. The cities of Freiberg and Zwickau took 10,000 copies each.<sup>180</sup> According to one estimate, as many as 200,000 flyers on behalf of Conservative candidates may have been printed in Fritsch's publishing house for the 1887 election.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Strödel to Friesen, 4.7.87, 29.7.88, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 273.

<sup>177</sup> Strödel to Friesen, 10/19.10.87, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 273.

<sup>178</sup> See Lexikon, 1:81–3; Zumbini, *Wurzeln*, 264–84, 290–300; Pulzer, *Rise*, 99–106.

<sup>179</sup> Fritsch, cited in Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 83.

<sup>180</sup> AC, no. 20 (Dec. 1887): 16.

<sup>181</sup> AC, no. 11 (Mar. 1887): 1, and figures cited in PAS, 76.

Fritsch's rivals in the antisemitic movement wanted to go much further, much faster. Otto Böckel in particular displayed no patience for Conservative leadership. He was one of the organizers of the Antisemitic Congress held in Bochum on 10–11 June 1889, which attracted some 280 participants. The new Antisemitic German Social Party pleased almost no one.<sup>182</sup> Even before the meeting ended, Reformers from Hessen, Hamburg, Berlin, Stettin, Kassel—and Dresden—had stormed out of the congress. Their exit made it easier for the remaining moderates to quietly drop the offending word “Antisemitic” from the party's name. From this point onward, Conservatives consistently stated their preference for the “moderate” German Social over the “radical” German Reform variant of antisemitism.

Even before the Bochum antisemitic congress of June 1889, the German Socials around Liebermann and Fritsch in Leipzig had a credible claim to be the dominant force in Saxony. Groups sympathetic to the German Social cause were springing up in western Saxony.<sup>183</sup> Programmatic consistency was not strictly required: the group in Zwickau, for instance, called itself the German National Union Germania. But generally these antisemitic groups emphasized social-reformist rather than racial doctrines, corresponding largely to the hopes of their lower-middle-class members for economic relief. Meanwhile, frustration with the outcome of the Bochum congress led a radical antisemitic Reformer, Oswald Zimmermann, to attempt to regain the upper hand. He founded an Antisemitic State Association for the Kingdom of Saxony. Zimmermann hoped to draw the new antisemitic clubs in western Saxony to his side. But the Leipzigers countered his initiative by founding their own Electoral Association of the Antisemitic German Social Party for the Kingdom of Saxony on 11 August 1889.<sup>184</sup> Neither body accomplished much beyond the planning stage.

Liebermann and Fritsch needed no state-wide backing when they made their boldest political gamble to date in 1889—and their gravest miscalculation. They misread the signals when the Saxon Conservative State Association met for its annual convention in July 1889. Friesen delivered a speech that reiterated what he and Mehnert had been saying for years: “The Jewish question must be resolved from the Conservative standpoint if it is not to be misled down demagogic paths.”<sup>185</sup> To back up his point, Friesen reported the good news that membership in the association had now risen to over 2,500. Liebermann and Fritsch probably regarded Friesen's news as a challenge to demonstrate their own strength in Saxony. On 11 November 1889 they sent a letter to Friesen proposing cooperation among German Socials, Conservatives, and National Liberals for the upcoming Reichstag election campaign, scheduled for February 1890. But the pact they offered was hardly likely to appeal to their would-be allies.

<sup>182</sup> See *AC*, no. 53 (June 1889): 9–11; *DW*, 30.6.89; *AZJ*, 27.6.89; *Lexikon*, 1:82f.; Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 89f.; *PAS*, 76–8.

<sup>183</sup> In Zwickau, Glauchau, Reichenbach, Crimmitschau, Döbeln, and Werdau; *PAS*, 78f., and for the following.

<sup>184</sup> *Vaterl.*, 17.8.89.

<sup>185</sup> Dönhoff, 8.7.89, *PAAAB*, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Count Bohuslav Chotek von Chotkow und Wognin, 7.7.89, *HHStAV*, PAV/45; *LZ*, 6.7.89; *Vaterl.*, 6.7.89 (Beilage).

It included the following points: 1. The Conservatives would agree not to nominate candidates in the constituencies of 10: Döbeln, 18: Zwickau, and 3: Bautzen and instead would support German Social candidates there. 2. The National Liberals would agree not to nominate their incumbent in 13: Leipzig-County, Ferdinand Goetz, "because no antisemite is in a position to vote for him."<sup>186</sup> 3. The Conservative-National Liberal Kartell candidate in 12: Leipzig-City must "issue a declaration that he recognizes the existence of a Jewish question and the urgency of its solution." What did the German Socials offer the Kartell parties in return? Not much. They promised not to run a token candidate (*Zählkandidat*) in any constituency—with the exception of Dresden (because, they declared, they had no influence over Dresden antisemites). And they promised to support the other Kartell candidates with their full energy, as long as none of them were Jews.

Friesen called together leading Saxon Conservatives and they rejected the German Socials' "pact" categorically. The National Liberals followed suit. The antisemites' offer could hardly have been more "tactless," "unclever," and "arrogant in the highest degree."<sup>187</sup> However, the "parties of order" could spare no votes if they hoped to repeat the success of February 1887. Therefore the antisemites' threat to mount counter-candidates or abstain from voting had to be taken seriously. The Conservatives maneuvered to ensure that they benefited from voter interest in the "Jewish question." Their declaration rejecting the antisemites' pact reasserted their party's right to define the Jewish question on its own terms.<sup>188</sup> It declared that "the struggle against the excesses of Judaism" had long been "a prominent part of the Conservative Party program." Therefore "a separate organization of an antisemitic party in Saxony [was] not only superfluous, it also [held] the danger of a splintering of loyal and state-supporting efforts on behalf of the Reich."

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Had Conservatives decided that the "Jewish question" held more dangers than opportunities? Not at all. In their public statements many Conservatives followed Friesen-Rötha by distancing themselves from "unscrupulous" elements within the antisemitic movement. In his candid moments, however, Friesen conceded that antisemitism animated his entire belief system, and he was not unique.<sup>189</sup>

How do we differentiate, then, between "principled" and "opportunistic" statements of political doctrine? This chapter and the previous one have tried to suggest ways to assess the degree to which Social Democracy, liberalism, and the Jews were perceived as genuine threats by their enemies in Imperial Germany. In the process, the theme of "fellow travelers" has become important to our argument. Lacking opinion polls, exit polls, and other modern means of gauging public opinion, we have had to use other sources to guess the motives of our main actors according to

<sup>186</sup> For the following, *AC*, no. 69 (8.12.89): 3–6; *Vaterl.*, 22.11.89.

<sup>187</sup> Dönhoff, 26.11.89, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 8.

<sup>188</sup> Resolution of 14.11.89, Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 167.

<sup>189</sup> See the earlier citation of Friesen to the eds. of *Der Kulturkämpfer*, 24.9.88.

time, place, and circumstance. We have identified a number of factors that help explain why left liberals, National Liberals, Conservatives, and even state ministers set limits to the repression of Social Democrats after 1871, though we have found more occasions when these groups felt compelled to rally together against the socialist threat. Social Democracy in the 1870s and 1880s was only just emerging as a mass movement, so it should not surprise us that social groups (like the bourgeoisie) and political movements (like liberalism) experienced difficulty in formulating a unified response to socialist protest, let alone any durable consensus. Similar ambivalence characterized Conservative reactions to the rise of radical antisemitism after 1878. For all the times these factions hammered at each other instead of the Jews, trying to claim leadership of the antisemitic movement to win votes and get elected, they found more opportunities to see themselves on a common journey.

To say this is not to claim that insiders and outsiders were indistinguishable in Imperial Germany's party system. All groups considered in these two chapters were enmeshed in a web of relationships that were in flux. Saxon liberals, Conservatives, and antisemites moved in and out of anti-socialist, anti-democratic, and nationalist communities of spirit, not always in predictable ways. In doing so, they engaged in the same acts of probing and retreating, harassing and defending, that armies undertake on the field of battle. In Saxony, party politics sometimes seemed to resemble a free-for-all, a melee. However, a closer look usually reveals Conservatives at the center of things.

Even before Bismarck fell from power in 1890, Conservatives confronted the task of reconciling traditional attachments to authority with the search for both scapegoats and allies to help them adapt to modern times. Except for those antisemites who resided on the lunatic fringes of the movement—and there were some of these in Saxony too—most enemies of socialists and the Jews grappled with the same challenge. We should stop arguing that Conservatives “tamed” liberalism or “co-opted” antisemitism. Instead we should appreciate both the principled and the demagogic faces of Saxon Conservatism as it adapted its ideology and practice during these transitional decades. But the centrality of election battles remains clear in all Conservative plans to meet the socialist, liberal, and Jewish “threats.” Not the force of will alone or organization or propaganda would eradicate these threats; rather, it was through mobilizing new social strata or re-energizing old ones that Conservatives hoped to bind themselves to fellow travelers, win elections, eradicate Marxism, and thereby rescue German society from existential threats. When these aspirations are seen in the light of a later period of German history, it is easier to grasp the historical significance of nineteenth-century strategies to defend Christian principles, promote social reform, redress a failed liberal experiment, and secure *Deutschtum* in the world.

## 6

### Authoritarianism Under Siege

During the first two years after Bismarck's departure from office in March 1890, Saxon defenders of the authoritarian state signaled their willingness to unleash violence against Social Democracy if a suitable opportunity arose. In 1892 and 1893, however, the Conservative Party was buffeted by doctrinal conflict and palace revolts. Its leaders were compelled to formulate a new political vision that focused on the Jewish "threat" rather than the socialist revolution. That vision offered uncertain rewards on the election battlefield, forcing Conservatives to defend their flank against antisemitic allies. After those allies achieved an electoral breakthrough in 1893, they were viewed with growing suspicion and contempt. Nevertheless, Conservatives and many others on the Right criticized radical anti-semites because they were *noisy*, not because they were wrong.

#### "1,427,298 SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC VOTERS!"

The leading personages of Saxony—ministerial, civil, and industrial—with the entire Conservative and National Liberal parties, . . . have never ceased reiterating their assurance that under the admirable system of joint proscription and cajolery . . . the working classes of the kingdom, and of the Empire, were being gradually, but surely, weaned from the socialist heresy . . . Yesterday's polls rudely dispelled these illusions . . . The present situation is one of arithmetic.

—George Strachey, British envoy to Saxony, on the Reichstag elections of 20 February 1890<sup>1</sup>

All the King's horses and all the King's men cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.

—Friedrich Engels, on the defeat of Bismarck's Kartell<sup>2</sup>

A seismic shock had rumbled through German electoral culture in the first year of the Anti-Socialist Law. Again in 1890, the political terrain on which election battles were fought shifted, this time in favor of the Reich's "inner enemies." The most

<sup>1</sup> Strachey (Dresden), to British FO, 21/24.2.90, PRO, FO 68/175. For 1890–93, unless otherwise noted, I cite Strachey's draft reports in PRO, FO 215/40, as compared with final versions in FO 68/175–8.

<sup>2</sup> Engels to Marx's daughter Laura Lafargue, 26.2.90, cited in Loth, *Kaiserreich*, 189–91 (English in original). On Engels's short treatment of *The Role of Force in History* (1887), see Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 6.

significant event was Social Democracy's electoral breakthrough. Non-renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law in January, the disintegration of the Kartell in February, Bismarck's dismissal in March, the lead-up to the first celebration of May Day—these were all interpreted in the light of the Social Democrats' stunning triumph at the polls, when they won almost 1.5 million votes in the Reich—half a million more than three years earlier.<sup>3</sup> "February 20, 1890, is the day marking the start of the German Revolution," wrote Friedrich Engels. "It may be a few years before we'll experience the decisive crisis . . . but the old stability is gone forever."<sup>4</sup> Engels' pronouncement did not reflect the actual state of affairs after Bismarck's fall. Yet observers correctly noted that Social Democrats now held one-quarter of Saxony's seats in the Reichstag.<sup>5</sup>

### GRASS-ROOTS CAMPAIGNING

The weekly campaign reports that Saxony's regional governors sent to the minister of the interior are revealing for what they highlighted and what they ignored.<sup>6</sup> They concentrated on the nomination or withdrawal of specific candidates, their prospects on the first ballot and in possible run-off contests, and their local connections. Occasionally they noted that the Kaiser's decrees, antisemitic interlopers, and left-liberal candidacies had a negative impact on the campaign. Overall their reports conveyed escalating tension leading to election day and deeper worries just before the run-off contests. They ignored the *content* of the parties' election platforms and they rarely reported on the mood of voters. These lacunae made it impossible for Saxon authorities to predict which constituencies the Kartell parties might win.<sup>7</sup>

In January 1890 the regional governor in Zwickau—the area where Social Democratic victories were most likely—already predicted that socialists would win "a minimum" of three seats in his region. "That could certainly become five," he added, to judge by the results of the Landtag elections held in 1889. This governor generally saw the glass half-empty. Baron Heinrich von Hausen had often predicted the worst as district governor in Glauchau; he continued to do so as regional governor of Dresden after 1891. But his warnings from Zwickau in early 1890 fell mainly on deaf ears. At the end of January, War Minister Alfred von Fabrice still expected a "favorable" outcome to the elections: he remarked laconically that "one or another" Social Democrat would be sent to the Reichstag. A week

<sup>3</sup> The *SD*, 8.3.90, prematurely proclaimed "'1,341,587 Social Democratic Voters' (8 March 1890)," GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7 (image): [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1459](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1459).

<sup>4</sup> Engels to Laura Lafargue, 26.2.90, cited previously.

<sup>5</sup> Prussian envoy Carl von Dönhoff, 21.2.90, 3.3.90; Austrian envoy Count Bohuslav Chotek, 1.3.90, HHStAV, PAV/46; Bavarian envoy Baron Friedrich von Niethammer, 4.3.90, BHStAM II, MA 2859.

<sup>6</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5383; also Mdl 10988, 11039; AHMS Annaberg 36; KHMS Zwickau 568.

<sup>7</sup> Pr. Mdl Ludwig Herrfurth to Bismarck, 4.2.90, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 9; BAP, Rdl 14682, Bd. 1; BAP, Rkz 1816; Hohenthal (Berlin) to Nostitz, 8.2.90, SHStAD, Mdl 5383.

later Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz predicted that “several” socialists would be elected in Saxony.<sup>8</sup>

In 1890 the Kartell parties were unable to match the grass-roots efforts of Social Democrats.<sup>9</sup> Finding suitable Kartell candidates proved particularly difficult. Often the most talented and experienced local notables refused to subject themselves to the odium of an election campaign. A second problem was that the Kartell parties were slow to name their candidates and launch their public agitation.<sup>10</sup> In one situation report (30 January) a single entry was deemed sufficient for 4: Dresden-New City, 5: Dresden-Old City, and 6: Dresden-County. “The agitation has not become particularly lively anywhere, at least not outwardly . . . In Dresden . . . one is already [!] thinking of going public with agitation for the Kartell candidates in the next few days.”

The SPD’s superior organization and élan were especially evident in western Saxony. In 16: Chemnitz, the Social Democrats campaigned vigorously in every town and village—from house to house, in the pubs, during breakfast breaks in the factories.<sup>11</sup> With each passing week, Regional Governor Hausen took more editorial license in suggesting that Social Democrats must be called to account for the electoral “terror” they were unleashing.<sup>12</sup> It was time to meet force with force: half-measures would not do. Hausen’s report of 4 February used single-sentence paragraphs to punctuate the urgency he felt.

In the current election campaign the Social Democrats . . . are employing a language that has never been heard from them before.

Not only are they more confident than ever of victory; for the most part they are also preaching outright revolution.

And even I have to admit openly that I know of virtually no solution to the current, tense situation other than one involving force.

I believe that then, and only then, will calm prevail.

Hausen was not alone in sounding this alarm. Regional Governor Max von Koppenfels of Dresden wrote on 7 February that “Social Democratic agitation has reached a fever pitch in almost all constituencies . . . It can be said with justification that Social Democratic incitement, which in my opinion is directed not just towards the Reichstag elections but more and more towards the goal of violent revolution, has never been in such full bloom as it is now.”

If we compare party “bastions” where one party won more than 60 percent of the popular vote on the first ballot, we see how the Social Democrats’ “incitement to revolution” led to a major setback for the “parties of order.” In 1887 Kartell

<sup>8</sup> Dönhoff, 30.1.90, 5.2.90, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 9. The Kartell parties expected to lose “4 to 5” seats in total; Niethammer, 12.2.90, BHStAM II, MA 2859.

<sup>9</sup> For the following, “Übersicht über den dermaligen Stand der Wahlagitation in den Wahlkreisen des Königreichs Sachsen,” 30.1.90, SHStAD, Mdl 5383.

<sup>10</sup> “Übersicht,” *ibid.*; cf. *Vaterl.*, 7.2.90.

<sup>11</sup> Göhre, *Three Months*, 90–8, 104–10. See “Paul Göhre Describes a Socialist Election Campaign in Chemnitz (1890),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1857](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1857).

<sup>12</sup> KHM Hausen (Zwickau) to Mdl, 26.1.90, 4.2.90 (citation), 14.2.90; for the following, KHM Koppenfels (Dresden) to Mdl, 7.2.90; cf. other reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5383.

candidates had won eighteen of Saxony's twenty-three constituencies with over 60 percent of the vote. Three years later that number was reduced to just three.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, Social Democratic bastions rose from zero to three (and then to four in 1893). Saxony in 1890 became the first federal state in which the Social Democrats polled more than 40 percent of the popular vote overall. The year was a caesura in one other way: from 1890 until 1912 Saxon turnout was always about 5 percent higher than the Reich average.<sup>14</sup>

The Saxon government and the Kartell parties found the election result "downright stupefying."<sup>15</sup> Social Democrats won six first-ballot victories, some of them with "crushing majorities." Interior Minister Nostitz was so rattled by the result in 13: Leipzig-County that he set off immediately for Leipzig to investigate for himself.<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Geyer, who already sat for the Social Democrats in both the Landtag and the Reichstag, had amassed over 30,000 votes and a 61 percent majority on the first ballot. This constituency would not be wrested from the socialists for some time to come. But it also became a cause célèbre. King Albert believed the prevailing interpretation of events: "wild excesses" and the "ruthless agitation" of the Social Democrats in Leipzig's working-class suburbs had shocked supporters of the "parties of order." But that shock had convinced them to set aside their differences just in time for the run-off ballots in other constituencies. Here was a silver lining not to be ignored, a lesson not to be forgotten. As Nostitz put it, the "terrorism" witnessed by Leipzig's law-abiding citizens made bourgeois voters elsewhere in Saxony "fearful and disconcerted" as they considered their options for the run-offs. Especially when the excesses in question "defy all description"—burghers could fill in the dots—fear gave the Kartell parties a last-minute rallying cry.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE SCALE OF VICTORY

The defeat of Bismarck's Kartell parties in the Reichstag elections of 20 February 1890 increased the crisis atmosphere in Berlin. Four weeks later, on 20 March, Bismarck was forced from office. In Dresden, Bismarck's departure did not give rise to "any displays of public excitement and consternation . . . Thus far, . . . not a ruffle . . . no meetings, no anxious conversations."<sup>18</sup> To be sure, Social Democratic leaders and state authorities throughout Germany were soon planning their next moves: How would they harness the planned demonstration of workers' solidarity on 1 May? Both groups feared violence. But none erupted. The same mood of solemnity marked Social Democratic celebrations when the Anti-Socialist Law

<sup>13</sup> Compare maps showing Saxon party bastions in 1887 and 1890 in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>14</sup> LRTW, 34 and Table. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Chotek, 22.2.90, HHStAV, PAV/46; Niehammer, 4.3.90, BHStAM II, MA 2859; Strachey, 21.2.90.

<sup>16</sup> Chotek, 22.2.90, cited previously; *DJ*, 22.2.90.

<sup>17</sup> Dönhoff, 3/5.3.90, cited previously; SHStAD, MdI 10988, T. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Strachey, 21.3.90. Cf. Niehammer, 27.3.90; BHStAM II, MA 2859.



expired at midnight on 30 September 1890.<sup>19</sup> Hence anti-socialists who wanted to provoke a showdown with “the forces of revolution” had to conjure up a mood of crisis and confrontation after 1890. In Saxony the twin threats of Social Democracy and radical antisemitism made this conjuring act easier. The prospect that Germany might spiral into revolution and demagoguery seemed plausible—imminent, even.

Nationally, the Kartell parties suffered a rout in February 1890. The two conservative parties saw their share of the popular vote drop from a combined 35 percent in 1887 to 19 percent in 1890. The National Liberal share dropped from 22 percent to 16 percent. Proportionally, the National Liberals lost more seats: their Reichstag caucus fell from ninety-nine members in 1887 to just forty-two in 1890, whereas the conservative parties saw their caucus shrink from 121 deputies to ninety-three. The three Kartell parties thus lost a total of eighty-five seats. Though not united, the non-Kartell parties—Bismarck’s “opposition”—were the clear winners in 1890. The left liberals increased their share of the popular vote by almost 50 percent over 1887. The antisemitic parties won fewer than 50,000 votes, but that total represented a four-fold increase over 1887. Both groups significantly increased the number of their parliamentary representatives: from thirty-two to seventy-six for the left liberals, from one to five for the antisemites (see Table 6.1).<sup>20</sup>

The Social Democrats’ breakthrough drew the most attention. Their vote total almost doubled, from 763,000 in 1887 to over 1.4 million in 1890. Their share of the popular vote roughly doubled as well, from 10 to 20 percent, and they now sent thirty-five deputies to the Reichstag. For the first time, Social Democrats won more votes than any other party. They would do so again in every general election—not only through 1912 but until 1932.

A fortnight before Bismarck’s dismissal in March 1890, August Bebel, now living in Plauen near Dresden, wrote a long letter to Friedrich Engels in London. Bebel understood that his party’s electoral triumph in February held portents.<sup>21</sup> Social Democrats had won fewer seats than expected in the run-offs: “I reckoned on twenty to twenty-five seats. Instead we have [won] only fifteen” (which made thirty-five when added to the twenty seats won on the first ballot).<sup>22</sup> Thus in future elections the Social Democrats would have to cope with a familiar dilemma: when the “philistines of all party affiliations” experienced Social Democrats’ electoral “terror” in the first round of voting, they would have a compelling reason to unite in the second. Therefore, as far as the Kartell *idea* was concerned, reports of its demise were premature. This was Bebel’s first insight. The election outcome, second, had made the bourgeoisie and the heads of Germany’s federal states more fearful of the Kaiser’s “unpredictability” and “stubbornness.” Wilhelm’s ambition

<sup>19</sup> See “A Working-Class Youth in the Harz Region on the Expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law (30 September 1890),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=677](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=677).

<sup>20</sup> See the map showing RT elections in Saxony, 1890, and the Royal Statistical Office’s depiction of all 397 Reich constituencies, also for 1890, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>21</sup> Bebel to Engels, 7.3.90, BARuS, 2/2:353.

<sup>22</sup> SD, 12.1.90, declared that the party’s success would be measured in 1890 by the number of RT seats won.

Table 6.1. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1887 and 1890

	21 February 1887			20 February 1890		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives	178,517	34.4	12	160,407	28.0	13
National Liberals	161,348	31.1	10	112,514	19.7	3
Left Liberals	29,873	5.7	1	52,776	9.2	1
Antisemites	—	—	0	4,788	0.9	0
Social Democrats	149,270	28.7	0	241,187	42.1	6
Total votes cast/seats	522,025		23	574,974		23
Turnout (%)	79.6			82.0		
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	1,147,200	15.2	80	895,103	12.4	73
Free Conservatives	736,389	9.8	41	482,314	6.7	20
National Liberals	1,677,979	22.2	99	1,177,807	16.3	42
Left Liberals	1,061,922	12.9	32	1,307,485	18.0	76
Antisemites	11,593	0.2	1	47,536	0.7	5
Social Democrats	763,128	10.1	11	1,427,298	19.7	35
Total votes cast/seats	7,570,710		397	7,261,659		397
Turnout (%)	77.5			71.6		

Notes: Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. For the Reich: caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*); Left Liberals include Liberals, Progressives, Radicals, and People’s Party. The Catholic Center Party, ethnic minorities, and smaller groups have been omitted for the sake of clarity. See also the tables of RT election results provided by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

Sources: “Statistik der allgemeinen Wahlen für die VII. / VIII. Legislatur-Periode des Reichstags im Jahre 1887 / 1890,” *SBDR*, 7. LP (1887), Anlage 73, 658f., 672f.; *SBDR*, 8. LP, I. Session (1890–91), Anlage 35; RWA, 40, 89; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 275 (for Antisemites, 1887, not including Stöcker, who ran as DKP).

to be a “great social reformer” produced uncertainty among bourgeois voters. “This ambition does us no harm; rather, it provides us a very significant advantage.” The Social Democrats’ “glorious election victory,” third, ensured that a new Reichstag would not reinstate the Anti-Socialist Law. Until that point many Germans had believed that a renewed Kartell majority would allow Bismarck to initiate a new law.

Bebel now considered a walkout or other demonstrative action on 1 May too dangerous. Such action was advocated by the “young green timber”<sup>23</sup> of the Social Democratic movement—*die Jungen*—who included a Saxon hotspur, Max Schippel, representing 16: Chemnitz. Bebel and Liebknecht would have none of it. Provocative May Day demonstrations would give socialism’s enemies the opportunity to use retaliatory force. A showdown would undo what had been achieved at the polls, diminish the sacrifice of countless Social Democrats since 1878, and provide the excuse for a coup d’état against the Reichstag and the constitution. Social Democratic

<sup>23</sup> Göhre, *Three Months*, 106.

leaders used martial terms to describe the risks and rewards involved. Workers had to do their duty on May Day with the discipline expected of good foot-soldiers; but victory had already been achieved on the electoral battlefield. Because the mobilization of voters had succeeded in February, the party had no need to hold a military review in May.<sup>24</sup>

Bebel did not misjudge the fears shared by Saxon state ministers and anti-socialist politicians at this juncture. But shared *Angst* and actionable consensus are not the same thing. The significance of Social Democracy's electoral breakthrough and how best to mount a counter-offensive were issues that continued to divide socialism's enemies in Saxony. Before the election, the "parties of order" had been well aware that they lacked a resounding election call in 1890. The Reichstag session of 1887–90 had accomplished little that recommended its Kartell incumbents for re-election. The cost of bread, meat, and other foodstuffs had risen sharply as a result of increased grain tariffs passed by the previous Reichstag. With their economy geared to export-oriented light industry, Saxons had not benefited from the increased tariffs on iron and steel that heavy industrialists had pushed through during the same session.<sup>25</sup>

The British envoy's disdain for the "torpid political habits" of Germany's bourgeoisie blinded him to the fact that Social Democrats in Saxony had been diligently campaigning for months.<sup>26</sup> Across Germany, turnout fell five points between 1887 and 1890, from 77 to 72 percent.<sup>27</sup> Saxony ran counter to the national trend. Between 1887 and 1890, turnout climbed from 80 to 82 percent. Whereas Kartell candidates in Saxony had profited from high turnout in 1887, the opposite was true in 1890. Social Democrats mobilized one of every three eligible electors in Saxony (compared to one of seven nationally).<sup>28</sup>

During the campaign, Saxony's non-socialist parties had seen the writing on the wall and tried to avoid the worst. So did the Saxon king. Anticipating bad elections, King Albert had secretly devised his own Anti-Socialist Law in conjunction with Saxon Justice Minister Abeken. His plan became a dead letter when the chancellor crisis came and went so quickly in March. But it would have replaced Bismarck's exceptional law with one premised on the "strict withdrawal of civil liberties from the rabble-rousers." Those civil liberties almost certainly included suffrage rights; they may also have included rights of association, assembly, and citizenship. When his plan was "crossed up" by the "young Kaiser's rash and over-hasty initiative" on behalf of workers' protection, King Albert was livid. He shared Bismarck's view that in the end one might have to "smash the pots." Like him, Albert believed that a bloody showdown between workers and soldiers might be needed to answer

<sup>24</sup> The terms used were *Aufmarsch* and *Heerschau*. Bebel to Engels, 31.3.90, Bebel to Hermann Schlüter, 19.6.90, BARuS, 2/2:356f., 363; *SD*, 19.4.90; Lidtke, *Party*, 305; Engels to Liebknecht, 9.3.90, Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Marx und Engels*, 366; Engels to Laura Lafargue, 26.2.90, cited previously.

<sup>25</sup> See *Tätigkeit . . . 1887 bis 1889*, rpt. in BARuS, 2/1:631–724; BAP, Rkz 1816, Bd. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Strachey, 24.1.90.

<sup>27</sup> These and some other figures are rounded.

<sup>28</sup> In Saxony, 22.7 percent (1887) and 34.4 percent (1890); in the Reich, 7.8 percent (1887) and 14.1 percent (1890).

existential questions facing the German state: how to “reckon with the possibility of a hostile [Reichstag] majority,” whether to dissolve parliament “three, four times,” “how to cope with Social Democracy,” and “what to do about the relationship between the parliaments and individual states.”<sup>29</sup>

## SHOOTING SOCIALISTS

The self-proclaimed defenders of state and society turned to new tactics as soon as they realized that the 1890 Reichstag election would be the last one fought under the Anti-Socialist Law. Without missing a beat, Saxon ministers and the “parties of order” used the election results as evidence that the struggle against revolution had to continue. Conservatives suggested that the election battle in 13: Leipzig-County had broken all existing bounds of electoral propriety. One report in *Das Vaterland* described a public meeting that had fallen prey to the “*unbelievably vulgar gutter-snipe style of the socialist brawlers*.”<sup>30</sup> Conservative party chairman Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha issued a proclamation that summarized Social Democratic methods as “a system of lies, deception, electoral influence, intimidation of opponents, [and] their mistreatment.”<sup>31</sup> He called for loyal Saxons to compile evidence documenting Social Democratic “terrorism” which could be presented to the Reichstag as soon as it convened. There was not a minute to lose.

Saxony was not the only federal state pressing the war against Social Democracy after 1890.<sup>32</sup> That the party’s center of gravity was shifting was reflected in the fact that Bebel and Liebknecht now represented non-Saxon constituencies in the Reichstag and moved to Berlin. As the later party chairman Paul Singer wrote, they belonged in the Reich capital—the “lion’s den” and the “focal point of German public affairs.” Singer was adamant that these men should not “fritter away their time and energy in the Saxon frog-pond.”<sup>33</sup> Bebel found Singer’s arguments compelling. “Leipzig is a *provincial city* like 50 others in Germany,” he wrote. By late summer 1890 both families had moved north.

Interior Minister Nostitz was glad to see them go; but still Saxony’s repression of “subversives” had to be escalated. Such repression was *not* intended to calm public fears. On the contrary, at least some members of Saxony’s state ministry welcomed the prospect of a shooting spree: “the authorities are constantly haunted by the fear of tumults.” Immediately after the election, King Albert tried to put himself into the

<sup>29</sup> King Albert cited in Chotek, 7/11.3.90, HHStAV, PAV/46; Bismarck cited in Spitzemberg, *Tagebuch*, 266 (7.12.89). Cf. Röhl, *Wilhelm*, 2:286f.

<sup>30</sup> *Vaterl.*, 7.2.90 (original emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> *Vaterl.*, 28.2.90; Dönhoff, 6.3.90, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 10. Cf. reports in SHStAD, MdI 10988, T. 1.

<sup>32</sup> See materials in PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82, Geheim, Bde. 2–7; Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, No. 1, Bde. 8–12; Europa Generalia No. 81, No. 1, No. 1, Bd. 3; Deutschland 152, Geheim, Bde. 1–2. Further references in Saul, “Staat”; Born/Henning/Schick, *Quellensammlung*; Born, *Staat*, chs. 2–4. Saxon efforts described in Chotek, 6.9.90, HHStAV, PAV/46; Dönhoff, 8/20.4.90, 8.7.90, 13.10.90 (copy); SHStAD, KHMSL 249.

<sup>33</sup> Engels to Natalie Liebknecht, 19.6.90; Singer to Engels, 13.5.90, in Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Marx und Engels*, 369f.; Bebel to Natalie Liebknecht, 2.6.90, BARuS, 2/1:358–61 (original emphasis).

shoes of non-working-class voters—i.e. the SPD's fellow-travelers—who had helped elect six Social Democrats. Motives other than adherence to socialist doctrine "had given them a reason to do so," claimed Albert, who proceeded to tick off the motives he felt to be important: "the native German penchant for opposition, or a grievance, an act of discrimination that they had allegedly suffered from their superior; dissatisfaction with their lot; the wish to improve it; putative harm done to their private interests by an official regulation; the worries of the lower civil servant class." Albert was convinced that most lower civil servants in the railway and postal offices "voted Social Democratic without belonging to this party."<sup>34</sup>

His ministers could not muster even this much empathy. War Minister Fabrice believed the "social danger" would lead to "bloodshed." The state's response? "One is armed," Fabrice observed.<sup>35</sup> If the Prussian authorities decided to disrupt May Day rallies with force, their example would be followed in Saxony—with "alacrity," reported British envoy Strachey. "The official caste, in all ranks, talks of strikers and socialists as if they were foreign enemies . . . The language I hear is: 'the time is not far distant when these people must be shot down with artillery.' The capitalist and shopkeeper class are equally intemperate."<sup>36</sup>

When Fabrice returned from Berlin in April 1890, he reported that all military commanders in Germany had received orders to react to "the least disturbance of the public peace" with "the most energetic repressive measures." They were also empowered, "if necessary, to declare a state of siege, with all the restrictions that go along with it: suspension of the right of assembly, of freedom of the press, etc. etc."<sup>37</sup> Prince Georg, as commanding general of Saxony's XII<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, issued orders to his troops that left no doubt about what the authoritarian state and German burghers expected of each other. "The welfare of the state demands that it offer a guarantee to all state-supporting and propertied parties that the state will protect them, as far as may be possible, from all violent assaults from workers. They [workers] must be shown that they are not masters of the situation . . . If the armed forces are called into play, their actions must be so decisive and forceful that immediate success is ensured under any circumstances . . . If weapons *must* be fired, this is to be done energetically."<sup>38</sup> May Day passed without violence. Yet Saxon industrialists and civil servants still thought that workers, "if recalcitrant," must be shown the path to reason with "bayonets and grapeshot."<sup>39</sup>

Saxon authorities were well-placed to continue the repression of the 1880s after the Lesser State of Siege on Leipzig was lifted on 29 June 1890 and the Anti-Socialist Law expired on 30 September.<sup>40</sup> Their best weapon remained the Saxon Law of

<sup>34</sup> Strachey, 6.6.90; Dönhoff, 5.3.90 (cited previously).

<sup>35</sup> "Gerüstet sei man." Chotek, 19.3.90 (cited previously); Dönhoff, 24.9.90, 2.10.90; *Germania*, 14.8.90; PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, No. 1, Bd. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Strachey, 17/25.4.90. Cf. Dönhoff, 3/16.24.27.4.90, 2/7/21.5.90, PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, Bde. 2–4.

<sup>37</sup> Chotek, 24.4.90, HHStAV, PAV/46.

<sup>38</sup> *Geheimer Erlaß*, 26.4.90, in Mehner, "Militärkaste," 229f.

<sup>39</sup> Strachey, 2.5.90; cf. Niethammer, 30.4.90; BHStAM II, MA 2859.

<sup>40</sup> Niethammer, 10.7.90, 20.11.90; BHStAM II, MA 2859.

Association and Assembly, dated 22 November 1850. Known as the “Saxon Jewel,” the clarity of this law was peerless—and so was its cut.<sup>41</sup> Its provisions allowed local authorities to ban Social Democratic assemblies—for example if organizers did not name their proposed speakers (§2)—and prevent the founding of new associations. But would the Saxon law of 1850 be enough? “We’ll have to manage without an Anti-Socialist Law in less than four weeks!” an agitated Fabrice exclaimed in September 1890. “The worst thing of all,” he continued, was that the “more clever, far-sighted, and moderate leaders of Social Democracy” had enhanced their own standing in the party since May Day, whereas those like Max Schippel who preached “excessive-revolutionary” action had seen their influence wane. Fabrice regarded *both* developments as a setback for his plans. Moreover, the “young Kaiser” and his advisors were disposed “to leave the Socialists to themselves.” Interior Minister Nostitz shared Fabrice’s frustration on these points. The Social Democrats’ cautious policy made it difficult to instigate a showdown. “Bebel’s moderation and increased authority” were “highly unwelcome”: “they make less and less likely the possibility of physical outbreaks, which alone would offer the prospect of finding a willing majority in the Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag for a sharpening of the Association Law and the Criminal Code.”

In the last three months of 1890, some observers believed Social Democracy was in disarray.<sup>42</sup> Yet such news did nothing to convince Fabrice that tolerance or neglect might be useful weapons against Social Democracy. When George Strachey asked him what Saxony’s government had in mind, Fabrice replied that its goal was “to silence and extirpate” heterodox opinion. Therefore one “must not operate with flea-bites but take measures of the most drastic sort.” Strachey replied “You mean shooting?”—and “the general intimated that he did.” Such a course was not feasible at present, complained Fabrice: the Kaiser “would oppose stringent measures.” But things might change in the future.<sup>43</sup>

## RECALIBRATING

In autumn 1891, the Prussian envoy Dönhoff reflected on the meaning of recent Saxon election results. He catalogued every factor that rendered anti-socialist unity out of reach—at the time and for years to come. These included:

1. the demographic inevitability of socialist gains at the polls unless association laws and voting regulations were rigidly enforced or revised;
2. the SPD’s talent for recruitment, organization, discipline, propaganda, and rhetorical excess;
3. the moral victories scored by the SPD at the polls even though their caucus remained small;

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Schmidt, “Organisationsformen,” 352.

<sup>42</sup> Dönhoff, 12.11.90, 5.4.91, PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, No. 1, Bd. 10; Chotek, 2.3.92, HHStAV, PAV/48; Niethammer, 1.2.92, BHStAM II, MA 2861.

<sup>43</sup> Strachey, 11/25.10.90.

4. the shame felt by Saxon burghers who were represented in parliament by SPD deputies of the most dubious social standing and character;
5. the unwillingness of antisemites to join an anti-socialist bloc and their preference for independent candidates (especially in the large cities);
6. the apathy and shortsightedness of Kartell voters;
7. the organizational incompetence of the "parties of order" and their inability to avoid competing candidacies in endangered constituencies;
8. the extremely slim margins by which Kartell candidates were either defeated or forced to contest what should have been unnecessary run-off ballots;
9. the Kartell parties' belated discovery that they were agents of their own demise; and
10. the likelihood that the lessons learned in one election would be forgotten in the next.<sup>44</sup>

Because of such inadequacies, the struggle against Social Democrats and radical antisemites brought Saxon Conservatives more electoral defeats than victories in the years 1890 to 1893. Those battles (not just skirmishes) shook German authoritarianism to its core. Saxon Conservatives were eager to accept a pioneering role even though the prospects of success against this double threat were doubtful.

Policy drift characterized Chancellor Leo von Caprivi's first two years in office. At this time, Saxony's state ministry was being transformed. In rapid succession (1890–91) four ministers died in office: Finance Minister Könneritz, Justice Minister Abeken, War Minister Fabrice, and Culture Minister Gerber.<sup>45</sup> One minister did not die with his boots on. Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz retired on 1 January 1891—a quarter century after he had joined Richard von Friesen's cabinet in 1866. He was replaced by a man who immediately took over the interior ministry and, upon Fabrice's death two months later, assumed the foreign affairs portfolio as well. This man served as Saxony's *de facto* government leader for the next decade and a half.

Count Georg von Metzsch was the owner of a knight's estate in Reichenbach, in the Vogtland district of western Saxony.<sup>46</sup> A "cool, reserved, and ruthlessly energetic feudal lord," he allegedly wanted to administer Saxony like his own *Rittergut*. He was said to be an "elegant, refined man" but one who exhibited "neither gallantry nor gratitude" when his personal interests were involved.<sup>47</sup> Metzsch was well acquainted with small-arms combat against Social Democracy. He had served as district governor in Dresden-New City in the 1880s. He also had an excellent personal relationship with the Prussian envoy Dönhoff.<sup>48</sup> Metzsch was the

<sup>44</sup> Paraphrased from Dönhoff, 14.10.91, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>45</sup> PAAAB, Sachsen 56, vol. 1.

<sup>46</sup> SHStAD, FNL von Metzsch; Klein, *Sachsen*, 106–16; Schmidt, "Zentralverwaltung," 119–21; Venus, *Amtshauptmann*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Luise von Toskana, *Lebensweg*, 135, and for the "alter ego" claim.

<sup>48</sup> Dönhoff, 2.10.89, 7/15.1.91, 1.2.91, 25.3.91, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, No. 2, Vol. 1.

“indispensable alter ego” of King Albert, and despite occasional conflicts—which escalated rapidly after 1900—he worked closely with Paul Mehnert to hold back the socialist tide.

In late September 1891, with Landtag elections just three weeks away, the “parties of order” in Saxony appeared headed for disaster. They were hopelessly disunited. Three, four, sometimes five Kartell candidates were running against each other. In the meantime, the Social Democrats had selected all their candidates the previous March. Both Dresden constituencies would fall to the SPD, it was feared. Other constituencies might fall too, unless the right-wing parties “soon join the election campaign with their *united* forces.”<sup>49</sup>

The previous Landtag elections of 1889 had increased the Social Democrats’ caucus to seven members (an eighth was added in a by-election in 1890). The balloting in 1889 had also shown a sharp decline in the Conservatives’ share of the vote over 1887 and an increase for the Social Democrats from 20.5 to 26.8 percent. These elections were still governed by the 1868 suffrage. In Saxony incomes over 600 marks were subject to three Marks in annual taxes. But 600 Marks had a different value in the 1890s than in 1868. Wages had been increasing at an accelerating rate and inflation was significant. In 1868 only about one in ten Saxons had been enfranchised for Landtag elections; by 1895 this has risen to one in seven—roughly 536,000 voters in a total population of 3,755,000. Despite this rise, about three of every ten Saxon males who were eligible to vote in Reichstag elections were still excluded from Landtag elections.<sup>50</sup>

The effect of a rise in the number of eligible electors was compounded by Social Democratic success at mobilizing their supporters to turn out on election day. By 1889 voter turnout for Saxon Landtag elections stood at 44 percent. It then leapt ten points higher in 1891, to 54 percent.<sup>51</sup> To the discomfort of the Kartell parties and the government, the breadth of the Saxon suffrage had itself started to become controversial, bringing Social Democrats and German Radicals together on common ground. One flyer supporting a Radical candidate in 1891 demonstrated the salience of this issue. Its first four demands were for (1) introduction of a single-chamber parliamentary system; (2) the universal, equal, and direct suffrage not only for the Landtag but for all local parliaments; (3) protection of the secret ballot and “electoral freedom”; and (4) redistribution of Landtag constituency boundaries.<sup>52</sup>

When the Landtag elections of October 1891 were completed, Saxon authorities were aghast at the outcome. The number of votes cast for Social Democratic candidates had more than doubled over 1889.<sup>53</sup> Three new Landtag seats were conquered, bringing the SPD caucus to eleven members. Government leader Metzsch ascribed the doubling of the SPD’s vote to the lapse of the Anti-Socialist Law a year earlier, to its “free and impudent” press, and to the defection of lower

<sup>49</sup> Dönhoff, 18/24.9.91, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3 (original emphasis).

<sup>50</sup> About one in five Saxons were enfranchised for RT elections; SLTW, 16, 46.

<sup>51</sup> ZSSL 1909 (1909): 2. See the map showing Saxon Landtag Elections in 1889, 1891, and 1893 (rural and urban) in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>52</sup> “Zur Landtagswahl,” SHStAD, KHMS Zwickau 569.

<sup>53</sup> From about 15,000 in 1889 to about 34,000 in 1891.



civil servants, who at the time received poor pay. More important was Social Democracy's success in helping workers achieve the tax threshold of three Marks for enfranchisement. Through the use of savings and credit institutions, through encouraging new arrivals to apply for Saxon citizenship—but also through what Metzsch labeled “sundry disreputable machinations”—the socialists had contributed to a sharp increase in the number of enfranchised electors. Metzsch was convinced that the three-Mark threshold was too low.

After the 1891 Landtag elections, Metzsch declared that Saxony's Association Law was now “more necessary than ever.” The matter was not so simple. A law dating from 1850 to harass Social Democrats had begun to benefit its intended victims. In his pamphlet *On the Landtag Elections in Saxony*, written in mid-1891, Bebel had singled out the “Saxon Jewel” for special attention. *Vorwärts* and even non-socialist newspapers throughout Germany had been doing so for months.<sup>54</sup> A special bone of contention was §20 of the Association Law, which banned any association “whose goals include the committing of illegal or immoral acts or which encourages or incites others to such acts.”<sup>55</sup> After May Day in 1890 passed calmly, Metzsch felt he could no longer defend the use of §20 to ban all Social Democratic meetings on principle.<sup>56</sup> He also believed the general economic downturn of 1891–93 was making the Social Democrats “more cautious.” Hence “now [was] not the time for the authorities to show their teeth.” They should wait for the moment when the SPD, perhaps “heartened by an economic upswing,” would become “more presumptuous and defiant.” Metzsch added that “to adopt a severe position at the wrong time is just as unwise and provocative as an inconsistent wielding of defensive measures.”<sup>57</sup> Such statements signaled to Berlin that Metzsch was weak—a fence-sitter. The label stuck. As we shall see, in 1905 Metzsch wanted to flee Dresden with his family in the face of bloody socialist demonstrations. The Reich chancellor ordered him to remain at his post.

\*

Uncertainty characterized the responses of German and Free Conservatives, National Liberals, and left liberals to the opportunities and challenges they faced during Chancellor Leo von Caprivi's four years in office (1890–94). Leaders of these parties struggled to find answers to three interlocking questions: Was national policy being formulated coherently by a chancellor and a Kaiser who both lacked Bismarck's experience? Could the struggle against revolution overcome pressures for reform and the scruples of those who defended civil liberties? And could the success of Social Democrats in mobilizing supporters and voters in the 1880s be emulated by the “state-supporting” parties in the 1890s? These issues provided the context within which “mass politics” was embraced—or resisted. The first and

<sup>54</sup> Bebel, *Landtagswahlen*, BARuS, 3:161–88; *Vw*, 2/3.4.91, 14/16.10.91; BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12853.

<sup>55</sup> Dönhoff, 6.2.91, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, No. 1, Bd. 10.

<sup>56</sup> Dönhoff, 15/21.4.91, 5.5.91, and circular to all KHMS, 20.4.91 (copy), PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, Bd. 5; Dönhoff, 16.4.92, 4.5.92, *ibid.*, Bd. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Dönhoff, 20.5.91, PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, Geheim, No. 1, Bd. 10.

second questions require only brief elaboration; the third was thornier and elicited more interesting answers.

Chancellor Caprivi's "New Course" alienated Conservatives profoundly.<sup>58</sup> The government's decision to reduce tariffs on industrial and agricultural goods traded with Germany's neighbors was the most bitter pill Conservatives were asked to swallow. By March 1894 they refused to support Caprivi's proposed trade treaty with Russia.<sup>59</sup> Suddenly an oppositional Conservative Party faced a "liberalizing" chancellor. Conservatives issued their battle cry against Caprivi "like a Cooperian Indian on the warpath,"<sup>60</sup> and they dedicated themselves to toppling him as soon as possible. But their first victim was party chairman Otto von Helldorff. He was hounded out of the Conservative Party's executive committees in the spring of 1892 by a loose coalition of party dissidents who drew on grass-roots support outside old Prussia.<sup>61</sup> By ousting Helldorff these "reformers" wanted to demonstrate that their party was *volkstümlich*—in touch with the mood of the people. Led by Wilhelm von Hammerstein of the *Kreuzzeitung* and Court Preacher Adolf Stöcker, this group believed that Helldorff's brand of governmentism and his attacks on "demagogic" antisemitism had undermined the party's appeal at the polls. Against Helldorff they deployed the argument that a statement explicitly endorsing antisemitism had to be included in the party's official program, which had not been revised since 1876. To that end they demanded nothing less than a general party congress—also unprecedented in the party's history.

Saxon Conservatives had never affiliated themselves exclusively with the *Kreuzzeitung* Group. Baron von Friesen-Rötha did his best to maneuver between the Kaiser and Bismarck, between the interests of agriculture and industry, between bottom-up pressures for change and top-down counsels of caution, and between moderate and radical strains of antisemitism. To some extent he accommodated diverse opinions within his party on each of these issues. In early 1893, Saxon Conservatives registered their ambivalence toward a new interest group, the Agrarian League (*Bund der Landwirte* or BdL), headed by Prussian Junkers.<sup>62</sup> Even though the League provided key assistance to Conservatives fighting election battles—inside and outside the party's traditional bastions—Saxon Conservatives were too dependent on business and industrial interests to endorse the League's goals unequivocally.

Saxon Conservatives applauded Caprivi's efforts to find support for a large Army Bill, over which the Reichstag was eventually dissolved and a national election was fought in June 1893. Before that campaign began, Saxon Conservatives had discovered that they could not keep antisemitic rivals at bay. Internal dissention grew correspondingly. It is impossible to say whether the renewed salience of the "Jewish question" was cause or consequence of Conservative inadequacies—it was both. The "burning question" of how the two groups would deal with each other could not be fudged forever.

<sup>58</sup> Nichols, *Germany*; Röhl, *Germany*; also Weitowitz, *Politik*.

<sup>59</sup> Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*, 23–37, 226–37; Retallack, *Notables*, ch. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Die Nation*, May 1893, cited in Nichols, *Germany*, 267.

<sup>61</sup> Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 6–7; Retallack, "Parteiführer"; Retallack, *German Right*, 331–44.

<sup>62</sup> *Vaterl.*, 24.2.93, 24/31.3.93; Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*; Eley, "Anti-Semitism"; Retallack, *Notables*, chs. 8, 10.

## ROWDY BUSINESS

Rowdyism in meetings sets the mob into that kind of drunkenness for which every spoken word is only an outward expression but lacks all inner significance . . . Whether one has announced that the meeting will exhibit a calf with six feet or the inevitable "Jew" is completely irrelevant.

—[Baron Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha],  
*Honor the Truth!* (January 1893)<sup>63</sup>

Terror . . . often arises from a pervasive sense of disestablishment; that things are in the unmaking.

—Stephen King<sup>64</sup>

Antisemites had fielded more candidates and fared better in western Germany than in Saxony during the 1890 Reichstag election campaign. Intensive grass-roots campaigning, supplemented by organizations like Otto Böckel's Central German Farmers' Association, produced victories in Hessen and Westphalia. Adolf Stöcker and Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg remained closer to the Conservative Party than did the other four antisemites elected. Saxon antisemites tried to draw the right lessons from both successes and failures in 1890. As they looked ahead to the next general election, though, their dilemma remained the same. The Conservatives could not easily be detached from their Kartell partners, and anti-Conservative rhetoric in Saxony usually proved counter-productive. The founding of the new *Antisemitische Partei* in Erfurt in June 1890, led by Böckel and Oswald Zimmermann, did nothing to draw Saxon Conservatives to their side. The new party's program advocated as its first point the "legal reversal of Jewish emancipation"—a demand too radical for most Conservatives, who also had no sympathy for workers' protection and a maximal workday. Even the antisemites' drift away from Caprivi's New Course produced mainly "dissatisfaction" and "loss of orientation," as Zimmermann conceded in April 1891.<sup>65</sup> Yet Conservatives and radical antisemites focused on the same goal of eliminating Jewish influence from German political life. Mutual recriminations often distracted them from this goal, but only for a time.

## PUBLICISTS

In the 1890s, Saxony remained a hub of antisemitic publishing in Germany.<sup>66</sup> Zimmermann's *Deutsche Wacht* addressed a national audience, as did Theodor Fritsch's *Deutsch-Soziale Blätter*. Thus two of Germany's three most influential antisemitic organs were published in Saxony.<sup>67</sup> Less well known is that Saxony in general, and Dresden in particular, became home to a remarkable number of

<sup>63</sup> [Friesen-Rötha], *Der Wahrheit die Ehre!*, 17f., in SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (1981).

<sup>65</sup> *DW*, 5.4.91; *PAS*, 82–90; Levy, *Downfall*, 70–3 and ch. 3.

<sup>66</sup> See Lange, *Elements*, ch. 4.

<sup>67</sup> The *Staatsbürger Zeitung* (Berlin) was the third.

authors after 1890 whose writings helped build bridges between Conservatism, radical antisemitism, and an emerging *völkisch* movement.

One such author was Julius Langbehn, who propounded a new "Germanic ideology,"<sup>68</sup> but there were numerous other *völkisch* writers in Dresden who produced novels, cartoons, poems, posters, pamphlets, and periodicals that conveyed both a sense of doom and hope for salvation from the Jewish "threat." Langbehn's publisher, Ferdinand Woldemar Glöß, produced thirty-three installments (1892–1901) of rabidly antisemitic tracts that achieved national prominence. Intriguingly packaged as "illustrated political broadsheets," these publications were cartoonish but not laughable. Literally and figuratively they unfolded a narrative of Jewish domination, exclusion, and annihilation. Later installments depicted a world either completely overtaken by Jewry or one from which every Jew had been removed.<sup>69</sup> Their anonymous author was Max Brewer, who had settled in the Dresden suburb of Laubegast in 1890. As one of the pillars of Germany's *völkisch* movement, Brewer's outlook mirrored that of many Saxon Conservatives in the early 1890s.<sup>70</sup>

In *Political Broadsheet* Number 12 (Figure 6.1), Brewer cast Jews in the role of death and the German people as sacrificial victims. Building on recent sensations alleging Jewish practices of ritual murder, Brewer depicts a procession led by two headless figures and a Jew wielding a gigantic slaughtering knife. There follow representatives of various social estates: clergymen, jurists, professors, artisans, artists, students, soldiers, farmers, and workers. Brewer shows prominent enemies of antisemitism, for instance the left liberal Rudolf Virchow; each is subservient to the Jews (Bismarck, by contrast, is mounted on a horse). At bottom left, the Social Democratic chairman Paul Singer is shown holding a money sack and offering a "socialist marriage" to the kneeling figure of Germania. In the background Brewer has drawn Hamburg's harbor, infected with cholera brought by eastern European Jews. Farming families are leaving Germany while Jews milk their cows and cut down their forests. Brewer's accompanying text offers the glue that binds together these threats. German Protestantism is afflicted with tolerance, liberalism, and philosemitism; it errs in seeing Catholicism rather than the Jews as the existential threat facing Germany. Only if the Christian confessions overcome their mutual suspicion will it be possible "again to take up the struggle against Juda with the vehemence of the Middle Ages."<sup>71</sup>

A half-dozen other antisemitic authors were prominent in Saxon politics at this time. Between 1890 and 1896 the editorial offices of *The Twentieth Century*, an antisemitic journal, moved between Dresden and Berlin. Erwin Bauer was closely linked with Theodor Fritsch's German Social Reform Association in Leipzig.

<sup>68</sup> Stern, *Politics*, chs. 7–10.

<sup>69</sup> See the important studies by Thomas Gräfe, *Zwischen katholischem und völkischem Antisemitismus* (on Max Brewer and the *Politische Bilderbogen*), including images on 168–82; idem, *Antisemitismus in Gesellschaft und Karikatur des Kaiserreichs* (on Glöß's *Bilderbogen*). Cf. Lehr, *Antisemitismus*, 60ff.; Suchy, "Antisemitismus," 260; Stibbe, "Publicists," 36–8.

<sup>70</sup> Puschner, *Bewegung*, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Taken from Gräfe, *Antisemitismus in Gesellschaft*, 106–9.



Figure 6.1. *Politischer Bilderbogen* No. 12, “German Dance of Death!” (1894). This was one of thirty-three illustrated political broadsheets produced by Max Beyer in the 1890s. They sold for 30 Pfennigs each in editions estimated at 5,000 to 10,000. From the author’s collection.

In 1892–93 he was at the center of antisemitic tempests that included the Xanten ritual murder trial and renewed attacks on Bismarck’s Jewish banker Gerson von Bleichröder. Bauer’s star dimmed in 1893 when he was expelled from the Saxon wing of the German Social Party: in return for financial aid from Saxon Conservatives he had helped with their Reichstag campaign that year. Heinrich Mann, brother of Thomas Mann, served for a brief time as editor of *The Twentieth Century* in Dresden, where he rubbed elbows with Conservatives and imbibed the antisemitic dogma inscribed in the journal’s program. Mann managed to keep this episode secret until the 1950s, when he was “outed.” Mann’s articles described workers as a “mindless mob.” They also sang the virtues of the *Mittelstand*, the *Heimat* movement, and the Protestant Church. Such writings brought together anti-liberalism, antisemitism, nationalism, and imperialism in new ways. Mann even called in August 1895 for the revision of the Reichstag’s universal manhood suffrage in favor of a suffrage based on occupational estates.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Stefan Ringel, *Heinrich Mann* (Darmstadt, 2000), 81–93; Rolf Thiede, *Stereotypen vom Juden* (Berlin, 1998); Lange, *Elements*, 207–14.

Ottomar Beta, whose real surname was Bettziech, was an independent writer with ties to Fritsch's many publishing endeavors. Beta bombarded the Reich chancellery with his own schemes to fuse the Conservative, nationalist, and anti-semitic messages, but he also contributed to Dresden's reputation as a congenial home for Germany's *völkisch* writers. A similar role was played by Felix Boh, a Conservative propagandist in Dresden. Boh was commissioned by Dresden's Conservative Association (under Mehnert's chairmanship) to write a pamphlet on *Conservatism and the Jewish Question* (1892). He attacked independent antisemites for stirring up mass hatred, but he linked modern Judaism with "the grossly materialistic, negative, un-German, anti-monarchist, anti-Christian, revolutionary spirit."<sup>73</sup> The oddest figure of all was Heinrich Pudor, whose father was director of Dresden's Royal Conservatory.<sup>74</sup> Heinrich settled in Dresden-Loschwitz in 1890, whereupon he took over his father's conservatory. Inspired by Richard Wagner's antisemitic essay "Judaism in Music," Pudor tried to implement its message. He soon moved on to other crusades, equally unoriginal, dealing with nudism, vegetarianism, and clothing reform, but he continued to churn out antisemitic tracts.

These antisemitic publicists were not mere cranks and misfits: they achieved prominence and wielded influence in Saxon Conservative circles. Old fighters welcomed new comrades on the common ground of *Deutschtum*. Antisemitic stalwarts also helped Saxon Conservatives reach a new audience and win elections, and their writing achieved national attention. The former editor of Saxon Conservatives' *Neue Reichszeitung*, Baron Eduard von Ungern-Sternberg, offered his latest thoughts on *The Jewish Question* in 1892.<sup>75</sup> Georg Oertel, an obscure schoolteacher at the outset of the 1890s, was a close friend and associate of Baron von Friesen-Rötha: he contributed the major work entitled *Conservatism as Weltanschauung* in 1893.<sup>76</sup> Saxon Conservatives invited these authors to address their rallies and sometimes they asked them to spearhead efforts to meld antisemitic, agrarian, and Conservative associations at the local level. The *Konservatives Handbuch* (1892) provided a compendium of such views. It described Jews as a "tribe" that was undermining the Christian population's sense of right and morality: "Whether as a usurer and an exploiter or, conversely, as a Social Democratic agitator, the Jew [is] always found . . . wherever one is working towards the decomposition and extermination of our *Volkstum*."<sup>77</sup> In short, "inflammatory antisemitism" was *not* limited to the extreme wing of the Conservative Party.<sup>78</sup> The title of one of Heinrich Pudor's journals suggests the new aesthetic pathways through which this message reached Conservative supporters old and new: *Dresden's Weekly*

<sup>73</sup> Boh, *Konservatismus*, 5; cf. Boh, *Boycott*; Boh, *Sozialpolitik*; see also Niewyk, "Problem," 347.

<sup>74</sup> Adam, "Pudor"; Puschner, *Handbuch*, 921f.

<sup>75</sup> Ungern-Sternberg, *Judenfrage*.

<sup>76</sup> Oertel, *Konservatismus*; SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577; Needon, *Oertel*, esp. 21–38; Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*.

<sup>77</sup> Deutschkonservative Partei und Reichs- und Freikonservative Partei, *Handbuch* (1892), 15–23. Cf. Schubert, *Rezeption*, 68f.

<sup>78</sup> As claimed in the otherwise insightful Niewyk, "Problem," 348.

*Leaflets: For Rebirth! For Freedom of the Spirit! For Ethical Truth! For Artistic Beauty! And Strictly German Every Step of the Way!*<sup>79</sup>

#### IN THE CLUBS

What did the antisemites and other parties in Saxony stand to gain or lose as the Reichstag elections of June 1893 approached? Regional Governor Hausen thought he knew the answer when he wrote his New Year's report of January 1893. He noted that in the previous twelve months a "wholly distinctive imprint" had been imparted to local politics by "the proliferation of antisemitic and German Social efforts and, under its influence, the process of disintegration particularly within the Conservative Party." Every one of Hausen's district governors had confirmed "the extraordinary increase of antisemitism [and] its influence among all classes of the population, especially farmers, small artisanal masters, etc." Not even the Social Democrats had kept pace with the "activity and successes" of antisemites.

The years 1890 to 1894 were transformative for the German antisemitic movement. Changes in party structures, programs, and personnel were dramatic, and Saxon antisemites were key players at each turn. The more radical and explicitly anti-Conservative wing of the movement was represented by the German Reformers. Four of the five antisemites elected in 1890 belonged to this group. Neither Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg nor Oswald Zimmermann was elected in a Saxon constituency, but they led the "moderate" German Social and "radical" German Reform wings of Saxon antisemitism, respectively. To emphasize their new strength, the Reformers met in Erfurt in July 1890 and formed the Antisemitic Party. It was renamed the Antisemitic People's Party in May 1891. As a party "of the people, for the people," this party's program called for the turning back of Jewish emancipation, a progressive income tax, workers' protection, a maximal working day, and guaranteed liberties of speech, association, and assembly. It also included two provisions that, if implemented, would have fundamentally changed German electoral culture. The first demanded that only "Christian German men (of non-Jewish origin)" be permitted to stand for election to German parliaments or be appointed to state offices. The second demanded the extension of the general, secret, and direct suffrage to all German Landtage. The latter demand was directed against Prussia's three-class suffrage, but like other antisemitic calls for electoral reform it worried Saxon Conservatives too.<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile Adolf Stöcker's Christian Social Party and the German Social Party were not idle. Although Stöcker told his followers in 1888 that the party had fared better in Saxony, especially Dresden, than in Berlin,<sup>81</sup> by the early 1890s momentum had shifted to Stöcker's rivals. Through Leipzig's German Social Reform Association, Max Liebermann and Theodor Fritsch worked to spread an antisemitic message that was more radical than Stöcker's but more moderate than

<sup>79</sup> Cited in PAS, 90.

<sup>80</sup> On suffrage questions and related reforms, *DSBl*, 19.10.93, 23.5.95, 30.5.95, 24.10.95.

<sup>81</sup> *AZJ*, 19.1.88, cited in Schäbitz, *Juden*, 357.

Zimmermann's (thus Reform did not properly belong in the club's name). They organized regular speakers' evenings and other public rallies—forty-four of them between the summers of 1890 and 1891. They increased the club's membership to over 1,000 by the end of 1891. And they facilitated the founding of new antisemitic clubs in the western half of the kingdom. This effort was aided by a large German Social party congress held in Leipzig in May 1891.<sup>82</sup> According to the party's own estimate, about 2,000 participants included 1,000 "delegates" who represented 100 Reichstag constituencies.

The Leipzig congress made it easier to cooperate with Saxon Conservatives doctrinally and organizationally.<sup>83</sup> The refounding of a German Social Association in Chemnitz in 1891 provided an example of the resonance this signal was meant to elicit. The new association was led by an antisemitic Chemnitz haberdasher named Eduard Ulrich, who already belonged to the local Conservative club. In 1891 Ulrich successfully proposed that membership in both clubs be made easier by giving a new antisemitic "interpretation" to the Chemnitz Conservative Association's own statutes.<sup>84</sup> Dual allegiances were seldom formalized in this way; but they were not required when two regiments marched against a single foe.

It is difficult to say whether German Socials or German Reformers held the upper hand in Saxony at this juncture. The number and size of Saxon antisemitic associations prompted widely differing estimates.<sup>85</sup> One illustrated guide published in 1893 estimated that of about 200 antisemitic clubs in the Reich, sixty—almost one-third—were in Saxony.<sup>86</sup> Those clubs drew most of their members from small businessmen, small farmers, artisans (especially masters), lower civil servants, and retail employees. Even women were not immune to the "lure" of the antisemitic message: according to Fritsch, they helped smooth its rough edges.<sup>87</sup>

In early 1892 the question of whether moderate or radical antisemites were coming to the fore in Saxony *seemed* to become moot. A "reconciliation conference" held on 4 December 1891 determined that districts lying to the east of Dresden and Meissen belonged to the Antisemitic Party's sphere of influence—that is, to the German Reformers. Western Saxony fell to the German Socials.<sup>88</sup> Leading Conservative contributors to *Das Vaterland* conceded that the organizational growth of an independent antisemitic movement was bound to affect their own party. But this "concession" should not be overstated or misunderstood. The older, wealthier, better-connected *grand seigneurs* of the Saxon Conservative Party played almost no part in the debate about how to respond to these developments. The von Schönbbergs, von Zehmens, von Burgks—these names were not heard. On the other

<sup>82</sup> Congress report in *Bericht*; cf. Levy, *Downfall*, 67.

<sup>83</sup> ZStAM, NL Stöcker, XV 2, Aufruf (22.4.91); cf. Lexikon, 1:83.

<sup>84</sup> *DSBl*, 7.12.90; *Vaterl*, 14.8.91, 4.9.91; PAS, 93.

<sup>85</sup> *ASCorr*, 27.10.89; *DSBl*, 13.3.92 and passim; Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 111f.; Lexikon, 1:84; PAS, 90.

<sup>86</sup> P. Westphal, *Illustrierter Führer durch die antisemitische Litteratur*, cited in Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 94f.

<sup>87</sup> *DSBl*, 14.6.91, cited in Pötzsch, *Antisemitismus*, 118.

<sup>88</sup> *DW*, 6.12.91, and other sources cited in PAS, 93.



hand, Baron von Friesen-Rötha, Arnold Frege, Paul Mehnert, and Georg Oertel did not have to rely on independent antisemitic groups to make their voices heard, in Saxony or in the Reich. Friesen-Rötha grabbed national headlines with his public demands for antisemitic program reform in December 1891 and June 1892. The house journal of the German Society of Nobles, the *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, had carried his antisemitic articles for years.<sup>89</sup> Arnold Frege continued to play a leading role in national agrarian organizations, in the Conservatives' Berlin caucus, and (later) as vice-president of the Reichstag. Paul Mehnert was an early advocate of the Pan-German League, the still-born National Party, and other quasi-oppositional groups that emerged after 1890. And within a year Georg Oertel had been plucked from *Das Vaterland's* staff and relocated to Berlin, where he quickly won a national reputation as chief editor of the Agrarian League's strongly antisemitic *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.<sup>90</sup> Most important of all, Saxon Conservatives placed not one but two of their leaders (Friesen-Rötha and Frege) on the nine-member commission that was charged in June 1892 with drafting a new, "broader" program for the German Conservative Party.<sup>91</sup> This gave them even greater influence in national party councils than they already enjoyed by virtue of Saxony's permanent seat on the party's Committee of Eleven. Thus Saxon Conservatives had impressive resources of men and materiel to throw into battle against antisemites they did not agree with.

The Conservative Party crossed a historic threshold when it endorsed an anti-semitic program plank at its Tivoli party congress of 8 December 1892. Saxon Conservatives claimed for themselves a leading role at Tivoli.<sup>92</sup> That claim was not unfounded. But they also contributed to a "Babylonian confusion" in their party leading up to the Reichstag elections of June 1893. Their "Icarus flight" of 1892 preceded their fall to earth in 1893.<sup>93</sup> But we should not forget another figure with wax wings who flew low and made it across the sea. His name was Daedalus: he, too, was a consummate artificer.

#### "THE OLDEST ANTISEMITIC PARTY IN GERMANY"

By one measure Saxon Conservatives were more radical in 1892 than the "rabble-rousing" antisemites. It is the comprehensiveness of Conservative demands for social, economic, political, and moral reform, not their tactical appearance, that represented something new and important on the Right. Bill Ayers, leader of the Weathermen,<sup>94</sup> once said that a "radical" is "someone trying to get to the root of things." Conservatives sought to demonstrate that the antisemitic parties were single-issue parties. Such parties, by definition, could not "get to the root" of Germany's ills. Nor could they serve the interests of German voters who expected

<sup>89</sup> SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577.

<sup>90</sup> Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*.

<sup>91</sup> *Vaterl.* 1.7.92; [Friesen-Rötha], *Wahrheit*, 34f. and Oertel, *Konservatismus; Vaterl.* 20.1.93, 3.2.93.

<sup>92</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Conservativ!*; Boh, *Konservatismus*, 19; cf. Levy, *Downfall*, 76.

<sup>93</sup> The two quoted phrases appeared in the *Allgemeine Konservative Monatsschrift* 49 (July 1892): 756f.

<sup>94</sup> An American radical left organization, originating in 1969 as a faction of Students for a Democratic Society.

their parliamentary deputies to organize themselves in effective caucuses and pass practical legislation.

Election campaigns and Germany's social democratization figured prominently in the minds of Saxons who wanted to craft a new Conservative *Weltanschauung*. Other challenges were more urgent but ultimately less important: the struggle for control of their party, its estrangement from the government, and the need to steer public debate on the "Jewish question" into "state-supporting" channels. These rationales for reform were compelling enough; but they were overlaid by an even more comprehensive desire to reinvigorate the struggles against liberalism and democracy, both of which dated from the 1860s. Saxon Conservative leaders conceived of these struggles on a front so broad that the function of political parties and parliaments would be transformed. Before the end of January 1893 they had set down in black and white a vision that claimed to redefine conservatism itself.

That new world view can be considered under five rubrics, of which only the first and last require our attention at this juncture: the defense of Christianity; the defense of *Mittelstand* and agrarian interests; the struggle against revolution; independence from Kartell partners and the government; and the wish to "move beyond" universal manhood suffrage. Antisemitism was crucial to every facet of this vision. Each strand of the *Weltanschauung* that Saxon Conservatives devised was unoriginal. But Saxon Conservative leaders were uniquely insistent that antisemitism alone bound these strands together and made them stronger. Because these were leaders, not rank-and-file activists, they could realistically hope to transform theory into practice. By changing German hearts and minds, they claimed they could *solve* the "Jewish question." And once they got "to the root of things," German authoritarianism would no longer be under siege.

Conservatives did not place the defense of Christianity at the top of their political agenda simply because, for them, Christian stood for "not Jewish." As each advocate of program reform offered his own rhetorical twist on the Christian Conservative theme, these pronouncements became self-referential. Conservative writers and speakers plagiarized each other shamelessly. Friesen-Rötha reached back to his own unpublished manuscripts from the 1880s to round out his arguments.<sup>95</sup> Other Saxon Conservatives drew freely on the phrases of radical antisemites whose agitational style they decried as demagogic. This *rifacimento* radicalized Conservative antisemitism itself. Consider Felix Boh's *Conservatism and the Jewish Question*, published in October 1892 at Paul Mehnert's behest. Without explicitly mentioning the legal emancipation of the Jews in 1869, Boh complained that the Jews had abused the "noble gift" they had been given, namely "equal rights for all." As witness for the prosecution Boh then quoted the non-practicing lawyer for whom he served as client and scribe: "as the Reichstag deputy Dr. Mehnert put it tellingly at the Conservative Party congress in Dresden [13 June 1892], '*from the Jewish problem has emerged a Christian problem.*' . . . Therefore every day in every German district we hear the battle cry grow louder: '*Free us from the oppressive dominance of*

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Friesen's "Gesichtspunkte" (1891); idem, *Conservativ!* (1892); [Friesen-Rötha], *Wahrheit* (1893); and earlier manuscripts, SStAL, RG Rötha.

the Jews.”<sup>96</sup> Around the same time the Saxon Conservative State Association published a broadside entitled *The Conservatives in the Struggle Against the Domination of Judaism and for the Preservation of the Mittelstand*. “Not a single Jew is to be found in any local Conservative association in Saxony,” proclaimed its anonymous author on page one. Saxon Conservatives did not like Jews personally, he (or she) added, and they did not do business with them. A contributor to *Das Vaterland* confirmed that no Jew could possibly have joined the German Conservative Party since its founding in 1876 because its Christian premise made that impossible.<sup>97</sup>

Today we might say that the “Jewish question” was being rebranded. But it was also being repurposed: Conservatives were adapting to changes in taste and recalibrating their goal. That Christianity lay at the center of what it meant to be conservative became evident in the new Conservative program agreed at the Tivoli congress in December 1892. The opening and closing lines of §1 stated that “We desire the preservation and strengthening of the Christian life-view in the nation and the state . . . We demand Christian authorities for the Christian people and Christian teachers for Christian students.”<sup>98</sup>

The Tivoli program barely scratched the surface of practical “solutions”—specific legislative initiatives—endorsed by Saxon Conservatives who wanted to realize the ideal of the Christian state. On two issues the Saxons were accused of being too circumspect. More accurately they were divided and inconsistent. The first issue was whether Jewish emancipation should be reversed. The Saxons generally conceded that this “gift,” regrettably, could not be taken back. But their writings were laced with thinly-veiled hints that the genesis of Germany’s dysfunctional liberal era lay in Jewish emancipation. Emancipation had been one of Bismarck’s gravest errors and it would be reversed as soon as circumstances permitted. The second issue was whether Jews constituted a separate race. Saxon Conservatives resisted efforts to define the Jews exclusively in racial terms. But a *völkisch* vocabulary increasingly infused their speeches and publications after 1890. “Every Christian *Volk* always has the Jews it deserves,” wrote Felix Boh; Germans were nevertheless waking up to the fact that Jews were perpetrating the “oriental rape” of *Deutschtum*: “From the *unification* of our *Volk* follows its *cleansing*.”<sup>99</sup>

From the autumn of 1891 through the spring of 1893, Saxon Conservatives were equally consistent in their effort to disenfranchise Germany’s “inner enemies.” Among those *Reichsfeinde* they included not only Social Democrats and Jews but also—more often with each passing month—radical antisemites. Conservatives believed that all three groups had to be combated together. *Das Vaterland* equated

<sup>96</sup> Boh, *Konservatismus*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Konservativer Landesverein, *Konservativen im Kampf*, 1; *Vaterl.*, 5/26.8.92.

<sup>98</sup> Compare the programs of 1876 and 1892: “German Conservative Party, Founding Manifesto (7 June / 12 July 1876),” GHDI vol. 4, sec. 7: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=681](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=681); “The Conservatives Embrace Antisemitism: The Tivoli Program of the German Conservative Party (1892),” GHDI vol. 5, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=758](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=758).

<sup>99</sup> The operative terms were *Einigung* and *Reinigung*. Boh, *Konservatismus*, 9–10, 13f. (original emphasis). Cf. *Vaterl.*, 27.11.91, 11.12.91.

“radical” antisemites, socialists, and liberals, on the one hand, with “snake-oil salesmen” from the American Wild West on the other.<sup>100</sup> In this effort Saxons were aided by members of the Landtag, *Mittelstand* advocates, administrators, and judges, all of whom made it easier to tar three enemies with the same brush. In 1892 the Saxon interior ministry responded positively to an unlikely but effective alliance between Saxon *Mittelständler*, antisemites, and animal-rights activists, who convinced the ministry to ban kosher slaughtering in Saxony. Though Jews protested immediately against this obvious discrimination, they did not succeed in overturning the ban until 1910.<sup>101</sup>

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Three programmatic statements by Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha illustrate that these disenfranchising strategies dovetailed with the decades-long struggle against Social Democracy. These statements were put forward in December 1891, June 1892, and (anonymously) in January 1893.

The first one played an important part in getting the ball rolling toward the Conservative Party’s Tivoli congress a year later. Friesen’s *Perspectives for a Revised Conservative Program* was delivered first as a ninety-minute speech in his home constituency of Meissen and then distributed widely as a broadsheet. It stated flatly that the Reichstag suffrage needed a “fundamental revision.” In what direction? All non-Christians should be excluded.<sup>102</sup> Friesen also advocated doing away with an electoral system “that in many cases delivers completely accidental majorities.” What would replace it? A system “that ensures that the intelligent elements of our population and social minorities are able to participate equitably in our parliaments because natural social and economic relationships are taken into account.” Friesen’s antisemitic message was endorsed by some 2,000 listeners at a meeting of Dresden’s Conservative Association in late December 1891, when Adolf Stöcker was the keynote speaker. Paul Mehnert introduced Stöcker “as the man . . . who steadfastly pursues his goal . . . to banish the foreign elements from our *Volk* and to give back to the German *Nation* its Christian German *Vaterland*.”<sup>103</sup>

By June 1892 the antisemitic wave in Germany was reaching its crest. Saxon Conservatives (rightly) felt pressured to declare where they stood on the “Jewish question.” They were also being asked to define their relationship to radical antisemites and identify which passages in the existing Conservative Party program required revision. At a state-wide party congress held in Dresden on 13 June 1892, Friesen-Rötha delivered the keynote address. Friesen’s local and national audiences were underwhelmed by his rambling two-and-a-half-hour speech, which tried to dodge the most pressing issues facing the party. Radical antisemites such as Eduard Ulrich were appalled by Friesen’s criticism of their methods, whereas his cautionary

<sup>100</sup> *Vaterl*, 14.8.91.

<sup>101</sup> Ban of 1.10.92; Diamant, *Chronik . . . Leipzig*, 127f.; see SHStAD, Ministerium für Volksbildung, Nr. 11136; Brantz, “Bodies”; Judd, *Rituals*, 86.

<sup>102</sup> Friesen-Rötha, “Gesichtspunkte”; *Vaterl* 4.12.91, Beilage. Reactions in *Vw*, 20/25.12.91; *NZ* 10, Nr. 29 (1891–2), 2:84–8; *DresdN*, 6.12.91; *KZ*, 2.12.91.

<sup>103</sup> *Vaterl*, 25.12.91.

words were considered insufficient by men like Gustav Ackermann and Glauchau's district governor Anselm Rumpelt (a Conservative who would later serve as suffrage expert to government leader Metzsch). "It is easy to hoist our flag to the mast," declared Rumpelt, "but difficult to lower it again." "We cannot compete with the parties that are exploiting the Jewish question, specifically because we cannot use the methods they have borrowed from Social Democracy."<sup>104</sup> Unbowed by criticism, Friesen listened to the praise he read in letters from colleagues and quickly published an expanded version of his speech, with an initial print run of 1,000 copies, as *Conservative! A Warning Call at the Eleventh Hour*.<sup>105</sup> Friesen's "warnings" are too familiar to bear repeating here, but he had two other aims. The first was to show that the Conservative Party was "the oldest antisemitic party in Germany." The second was to target universal suffrage and Social Democracy as part of a larger battle plan that was to be directed, paradoxically, against the Jews and radical antisemites.

In his speech of 13 June 1892 Friesen pulled no punches in pursuing his first aim. He identified those passages in the Conservative Party's founding program of 1876 that had used coded language to defend Christian principles and oppose "the so-called 'political emancipation of the Jews' by legislative means." He then trumpeted Saxon Conservatives' success in holding back the "Jewish tide." He assured representatives of the Saxon state, many of whom stood among his listeners, that their cooperation was appreciated. At the same time he declared that independent antisemitic parties were redundant—and dangerous.

In the defense of Christianity, monarchy, and *Deutschtum*, . . . the Conservative Party has demonstrated its antisemitism since its founding. Today it stands as the oldest, most vigorous, most powerful, and most influential of all antisemitic parties.

It is also thanks to the Saxon Conservatives that the Jews have been less able to find a home in Saxony than in any other state.

Our judiciary has remained untainted, Jews are rarely found among our teachers, and our parliamentary chambers have remained as insulated from the Jews as has the state bureaucracy . . .

These are all circumstances which the Conservative Party in Saxony can look upon with satisfaction. Thus when a new antisemitic party, which cannot point to the least practical success, attacks Conservative antisemitism in order to replace it with a new party organization, we are obliged to refute such slander as decisively as possible.<sup>106</sup>

Friesen's friend Georg Oertel counseled him to omit the passages attacking universal suffrage from the printed version of his speech, lest it become even longer and more unfocused. The Saxon Conservative chairman took the opposite course: he expanded this part of his "program" into a ten-page appendix.<sup>107</sup> Social Democrats,

<sup>104</sup> LZ, 16.6.92.

<sup>105</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Conservativ!* Cf. DJ, 13.6.92, Beilage; LZ, 13–16.6.92; DSB!, 29.6.92; Vaterl., 10.6.92–29.7.92; Niethammer, 20.6.92, BHStAM II, MA 2861. Letters to Friesen in SächsStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577.

<sup>106</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Conservativ!*, 23; cf. Boh, *Konservatismus*, 14f.

<sup>107</sup> Friesen-Rötha, *Conservativ!*, 26f., 47–57.

he claimed, had used universal suffrage to unleash their electoral “terrorism” on German voters with more ferocity in every election since 1867. Now a revision of universal suffrage had become a “pressing necessity” before the “swamp of materialism” closed over the heads of the German people and their state governments. Exactly how far that revision would go remained unclear. Felix Boh felt that the Reichstag needed a new suffrage based on occupational estates.<sup>108</sup> Heinrich von Erdmannsdorff—district governor in Chemnitz and an executive member of the Saxon Conservative Party—counseled Friesen to continue his uphill struggle. “[Your] proposal about the suffrage has had a blistering effect in the countryside,” he wrote. “That it would not appeal to everyone was to be expected. Whether we will indeed live to see a revision of the suffrage? One can hope.”<sup>109</sup>

Something new was added to these familiar tropes by Friesen’s *Warning Call* and his anonymous brochure *Honor the Truth!*,<sup>110</sup> by a battery of articles in *Das Vaterland*<sup>111</sup> and the *Dresdner Nachrichten*,<sup>112</sup> and in the Conservative brochure dedicated to the “struggle against the dominance of Judaism.” In these publications Saxon Conservatives provided a clearer definition of “demagogy” and how it could be combated.

With his brochure *Honor the Truth!* Friesen attacked demagogues of all sorts. The Reichstag suffrage, he argued, represented a continual plebiscite to which only a republic, not a monarchical system, could subject itself. It fostered a profit-driven, scandal-seeking press and a literary “proletariat” that lived from sensationalism and grumbling. The “masses” were flattered, cajoled, and lied to, merely to win their votes. Moreover, those masses had mistakenly come to believe that the unity of the Reich rested on the decisions of the Reichstag, whereas in fact it was guaranteed only by the “unity of its princes.” Friesen argued that one must not merely tinker with the Reichstag suffrage, for example by raising the voting age to thirty. Instead Germany faced its hour of decision: “The foundational pillars of the system of state are legislative order, authority, a sense of right and morality.”

How had Jewish “ascendancy” and the rise of “radical” antisemitism added to the dangers of universal suffrage? On the one hand, the “semitic-naturalistic *Weltanschauung*,” based on liberal theories, was to blame. “Dissatisfaction, mistrust, cold calculation, [and] pessimism have taken hold of the excited soul of the *Volk* . . . The Jew has harvested the fruits of this wild agitational clamor.” On the other hand, antisemitism, “properly led,” promised to save the German nation from liberalism and Mammonism. The difficulty was that universal suffrage had seduced not only liberals and socialists but Bismarck himself. Friesen put it this way: “Are not universal suffrage, unlimited freedom of the press, [and] freedom of assembly all *demagogic* factors lying at the heart of our imperial constitution? . . . Does universal

<sup>108</sup> Boh, *Konservatismus*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Erdmannsdorff to Friesen, 13.9.92, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1577.

<sup>110</sup> [Friesen-Rötha], *Der Wahrheit die Ehre!*, SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576.

<sup>111</sup> *Vaterl.*, 12.8.92, on suffrage revision.

<sup>112</sup> On the *Dresdner Nachrichten*’s “wide circulation” and “rabid antisemitism,” see Saxon envoy to Prussia Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen (Berlin) to MdAA Metzsch (Dresden), 29.12.92, SHStAD, MdAA, GsB, Nr. 3302.

suffrage not owe its existence to Bismarck's intention to exploit demagoguery against conservative particularism in the states outside Prussia?" Referring to Bismarck's anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf*, Friesen added: "At that time didn't the governmental press hit every possible note when it blew the demagogic horn?"<sup>113</sup>

#### SPINNING TIVOLI

On 8 December 1892 the Conservative Party finally held its long-awaited party congress.<sup>114</sup> The story of the Tivoli meeting is familiar and can be quickly told.<sup>115</sup> As Stöcker noted later, "It was not a party congress in dress-coat and white gloves, but in street clothes. It was the Conservative Party in the era of the universal, equal suffrage."<sup>116</sup> Stöcker's remark puts into context one of the most famous statements made from the floor of the congress. Introducing himself as a "man of the people," the Chemnitz antisemite Eduard Ulrich declared that the Conservative Party had to become "a little more 'demagogic.'" The demagoguery Ulrich advocated was also intended to overcome the stuffy politics of notables: "Gentlemen: . . . It is common practice today among the leading circles of the Conservative Party, that everything . . . that moves the people is very easily dismissed with the stock phrase 'demagogic.' (Quite right!) I must ask our honourable deputies to become a little more 'demagogic'—but not in the bad sense, rather in the good sense. (Bravo!) It is necessary that the leaders of our party become more accustomed to striking the tone of the people."<sup>117</sup>

The Tivoli congress created a political sensation that reached as high as the Kaiser's entourage of advisors, ministers, and hunting companions.<sup>118</sup> These men saw many dangers ahead: the elimination of governmental moderates and older parliamentarians from positions of influence in the Conservative Party; the future instability of the Kartell; the apparent transformation of the Conservative Party into a group of radical antisemites; and the revolutionary potential of any appeal to mass sentiments.<sup>119</sup> The consensus was that the Conservative Party leadership had capitulated to "the mob" in December 1892. The governmental Otto von Hellendorff, no longer party chairman, sounded this warning when he wrote that "we are faced with a frightful brutalization of public opinion . . . In the end, this movement is the certain seed of Social Democracy" (see Figure 6.2).

Saxony's envoy to Prussia, Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen,<sup>120</sup> spoke with Chancellor Caprivi over dinner on 13 December 1892. Caprivi expressed the same "extreme displeasure" with the Tivoli Conservatives that he had voiced

<sup>113</sup> [Friesen-Rötha], *Wahrheit*, 38. <sup>114</sup> DKP, *Bericht . . . Parteitag . . . 1892*.

<sup>115</sup> More details and references in Retallack, *Notables*, ch. 7; Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Stöcker (28.2.93) cited in Frank, *Stoecker*, 233. Cf. Theodor Fritsch in *DSBl*, 13.11.92–11.12.92.

<sup>117</sup> DKP, *Bericht . . . Parteitag . . . 1892*, 12. On definitions of demagoguery and populism, see Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 2:465–72; Hellendorff's reactions in Eulenburg, *Korrespondenz*, 2:988–98, 1181.

<sup>119</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch (Dresden), 7/13/14.12.92, SHStAD, MdAA, GsB, 3302, and for the following paragraphs.

<sup>120</sup> Saxony's future government leader 1906–09.



**Figure 6.2.** Disturbers are Thrown Out of a Berlin Meeting during a Reichstag Election Campaign. After a sketch by J. Hosang.

Source: Achim Zink, *Bilder aus dem alten Deutschen Reichstag 1867–1900* (Bonn, 1980), 20.

in an impassioned Reichstag speech the previous day. But in private, to Hohenthal's relief, Caprivi differentiated between Prussian and Saxon Conservatives. He declared that the Prussian Conservatives had abandoned their old traditions and duty to the state: "he could not make peace with them before they learn to rein in their demagogic elements." In Saxony, by contrast "one finds a firm, purposeful government, which has been lacking here [in Prussia] for some years." "In Saxony," continued Caprivi, "a Conservative man has never yet mounted personal opposition to his king." Responding to a question from Hohenthal about a "possible conflict" in the future, by which the Saxon envoy meant deadlock between the government and a recalcitrant Reichstag, Caprivi replied that "if—'God forbid'—it should come, it could not be limited to the realm of the Army Bill." Rather, it would "immediately have to be expanded" to embrace "the elimination of the Reichstag suffrage in its present form." "Under this precondition," Caprivi added, he believed "the conflict could be carried through, especially if it were bolstered by street violence from the other side." Hohenthal's report was immediately circulated among Saxon state ministers and shown to King Albert. It was not to be the last time that Caprivi (and his successors) hinted to the Saxons that their support would be essential for a successful coup d'état against the Reichstag.



The sword Tivoli placed in the hands of Saxony's Conservative leaders was two-edged. They accepted the verdict of Tivoli with mixed feelings. While they were petulant about the rowdy conduct of the congress, they welcomed its outcome. Friesen's brochure *Honor the Truth!* amounted to a post hoc justification of the Conservative Party's history since 1876, according to which Tivoli was the appropriate culmination of that history because it broke with Helldorff's "unprincipled" governmentalism and demonstrated that the Conservative Party was the "oldest antisemitic party" in Germany. In the weeks and months following their party congress, Conservatives of all ranks participated in the effort to "spin" Tivoli. Georg Oertel dispatched *Conservatism as Weltanschauung* to the Reich chancellery as soon as it was published. Eduard Ulrich wrote to Chancellor Caprivi to explain what he had meant by "demagogy in the good sense." And he issued a broadside entitled *State-Supporting Demagogy and State-Endangering Pussy-Footing*. It was published by the same Dresden firm that was churning out Max Beyer's *Political Broadsheets*.<sup>121</sup>

These rejoinders clarified nothing. In *Honor the Truth!* Friesen posed questions to his readers that were not easy to answer. "Where is the dividing line between rowdy antisemitism and those antisemitic party organizations that address antisemitism in a circumspect and judicious way?" What exactly does "bad" demagogy look like? What does it sound like? What does it *feel* like? Friesen's answer was murky. In his account it is virtually impossible to distinguish among the "rabble-rousing" tactics used by Social Democrats, Jews, and radical antisemites. Even the beer-bench politics of Pan-Germans, student corps, and veterans' associations loomed in his dystopia, which reflected all his class pretensions and political prejudices.<sup>122</sup>

*Rowdyism* is a singular sport of the uneducated masses . . .

It is mandatory to greet the speaker with rowdy applause, and even here there is an opportunity to set lungs, hands, feet, and the lids of beer steins into the desired state of motion. A hired group of applauders has to make sure that this movement does not cease. The enjoyment of spirits and the alcoholic atmosphere increase the need to call out and rave. If the word "Jew" is mentioned, then the jubilation has no end . . .

The speaker has been deeply moved by the applause, . . . the approval, . . . the jubilation . . . After every meeting his speech has become more spirited, he feels himself more and more certain that any nonsense he dispenses will be applauded.

Rowdyism is infectious. Soon one demands these kinds of rabble-rousing meetings in every village . . . Always new meetings . . . The leaders [of the antisemitic movement] soon feel themselves to be the people's representatives, from whom the governments, in sheer amazement, declare themselves obligated to seek counsel.

One could proclaim this "rowdyism," in and of itself, to be benign. However, it is a *big lie*—it relies on deception and breeds deception. Therein lies a danger that cannot be underestimated.

<sup>121</sup> Oertel, *Konservatismus*, 11. Ulrich to Caprivi, 14.12.92; BAP, Rkz 673, Bd. 3; Ulrich, *Demagogie*; Dönhoff to Caprivi, 20.12.92, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 16.

<sup>122</sup> [Friesen-Rötha], *Wahrheit*, 17–19 (emphasis added in last paragraph); Cf. Oertel, *Konservatismus*, 61f.

# POLITICS IN AN OFF KEY

One person sees the evil here, another sees it there: this one in the Jews, that one in the priests, this one in capital, that one in labor, this one in the lack of authority, that one in the lack of freedom—only one thing is certain: things are in a bad way . . . We live in an evil time.

—*Preußische Jahrbücher* (January 1893)<sup>123</sup>

An all-pervading restless pessimism exhibits itself, now in a beautiful impractical idealism, now in a carping cynicism.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, while a student in Berlin, on the Reichstag election campaign of June 1893<sup>124</sup>

As patrons of genuine antisemitism whose ambitions were based on high moral principles—that is how Saxon Conservatives saw themselves in January 1893. As victims of radical antisemitism who had unwittingly opened Pandora's Box—that is how historians have described them after the Reichstag elections in June.<sup>125</sup> The truth lies in between. The notion that Conservatives suffered devastating electoral defeat at the hands of antisemites contains a kernel of truth. Each of the six Saxon constituencies won by antisemites in June 1893 was previously held by a Conservative. But considering all of Saxony's constituencies together,<sup>126</sup> we discover that both camps, Conservatives and antisemites, were internally divided and inconsistent. Above all they were pragmatic—neither bitter rivals nor steadfast allies.

Three general points can be made about this election. First, it is impossible to differentiate clearly among German Reform, German Social, and Conservative Party candidates, many of whom drew on two or three of these parties for support. Second, the "Jewish question" was much more hotly debated in Saxony than the Army Bill. This negatively affected Conservatives' ability to ally with National Liberals and Progressives according to older Kartell traditions. Third, even after the "radical" German Reformers had gained ascendancy in Saxony over the "moderate" German Socials, their platforms on the "Jewish question" did not diverge much from those of Conservative candidates. That lack of differentiation makes it difficult to explain voters' receptivity to antisemitism according to distinctions of party, class, occupation, or locality. Not long before the election, Theodor Fritsch declared that "today . . . it is an art *not* to be an antisemite."<sup>127</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Cited in Nichols, *Germany*, 229.

<sup>124</sup> Du Bois, "Condition," 171.

<sup>125</sup> Pulzer, *Rise*, 114f., and Levy, *Downfall*, 85, offer more nuanced appraisals than many other works.

<sup>126</sup> For details on all 23 Saxon RT WKe and their candidates, see the figure showing Reichstag constituency contests in Saxony, June 1893, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>127</sup> *DSBl*, 5.1.93 (emphasis added); cf. *DSBl*, 26.6.9–20.7.93.

## ALLIANCES, PROPAGANDA, AGITATION

Since 1891 the Kaiser had been pressing Chancellor Caprivi to introduce an Army Bill in the Reichstag. His wish was met in January 1893. It quickly became clear that both the taxes necessary to cover the costs of increased military spending and the Kaiser's unwillingness to abandon three-year service were unpopular among the parties and their voters. On 6 May 1893 the government's Army Bill was defeated in the Reichstag. Caprivi had entered the house carrying the red dispatch case containing the decree—already signed by Wilhelm II—dissolving parliament. National elections were set for 15 June.

Everywhere in the Reich Conservatives faced an uphill battle. The public mood was particularly downcast in Saxony. Social Democrats, Radicals, and antisemites all voiced the grievances of lower- and middle-class voters—including artisans, shopkeepers, small businessmen, small farmers, school teachers, and other *Mittelständler*. These combined in “a chorus of universal discontent.”<sup>128</sup> Conservative prospects were further diminished by the general economic downturn; by drought conditions that augured disastrous harvests; and by National Liberal reluctance to ally with “extreme” Conservatives of the Tivoli ilk.<sup>129</sup>

When the campaign began, Heinrich von Hausen, now regional governor of Dresden and a Conservative Party insider, reported that he could not guess the election outcome in his region: “any [attempt to] fall back on previous statistics will be inaccurate.” He wrote that “for the supporters of the Reich government, there could hardly be a less appropriate moment for a test of strength.”<sup>130</sup> District governors reporting to Hausen convinced him there would be many run-off contests: “the situation is truly precarious.” Indecision characterized the early weeks of the Conservative campaign, but it persisted, and so did in-fighting among the non-socialist parties. The Conservatives flatly rejected the state-wide agreement offered by Saxon National Liberals, while the antisemitic Reformers were confident they could defeat Conservative opponents in the eastern half of the kingdom. Any talk of “compromises or Kartells,” declared the Reform leader Oswald Zimmermann in one campaign rally, represented “treason against our own cause.” It was remarkable, he added sarcastically, “that now the lofty gentlemen [Conservatives] all want to anoint themselves with antisemitic oil.”<sup>131</sup> *Das Vaterland* and Friesen-Rötha admitted that emphasis on the Jewish question was intended to prevent further defections from the Conservative to the antisemitic camp and to steer the latter movement into “the correct paths.”<sup>132</sup> But neither aim could be achieved with the candidates willing to run under the Conservative banner. As Hausen reported, “the blame lies with the hapless tactics of the parties

<sup>128</sup> Strachey, 4.1.93, PRO, FO 68/178.

<sup>129</sup> Dönhoff, 20.4.93, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 17; Strachey, 25.2.93 (draft), PRO, FO 215/40; Mehnert to Fechenbach, 24.2.93, BAK, NL Fechenbach, 1890er Jahre.

<sup>130</sup> Report of 25.5.93, SHStAD, Mdi 5385; cf. Strachey, 10.6.93, PRO, FO 68/178.

<sup>131</sup> *DW*, 21.5.93; cf. PAS, 108.

<sup>132</sup> *Vaterl*, 28.4.93; Dönhoff, 11/19/22.5.93, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 16; Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 12.

of order, who first nominate one candidate, then drop him, and finally rally to his banner again, thereby leading everyone to conclude that they don't know what they want and don't have any confidence in their own cause."<sup>133</sup>

Hausen's observation underscores the difficulty of defining the "parties of order" in this particular election. Inconsistency and disagreement arose over three distinctions. First, most observers included the German Socials among the "parties of order" and excluded the German Reformers. This distinction was plausible because the latter explicitly targeted Conservative ridings in Saxony 1–8 and because the former generally supported (or served as proxies) for Conservatives in the west. Yet many authorities, right up to the Kaiser himself, regarded the German Socials, too, as beyond the pale. Conversely, Berlin police registered surprise that even radical antisemites like Hermann Ahlwardt were featured in Conservative Party rallies in Berlin.<sup>134</sup> The African-American historian W. E. B. Du Bois, who at that time was studying in Berlin, noted that Conservatives, "by a sort of natural inertia, . . . stooped to join hands . . . [with] neo-antisemitism."<sup>135</sup>

Second, a split among left liberals over the Army Bill produced confusion. Most left liberals in Saxony sympathized with the Radical Union (*Freisinnige Vereinigung*), whose members wanted to continue the pro-government and pro-Kartell policies of the Saxon Progressive Party. That these liberals continued to be called the Saxon *Kammerfortschritt* revealed that their main strength lay in the Landtag, not on the hustings. A similar situation characterized the antisemites' stance on the Army Bill. Whereas the German Socials and the Conservatives supported it from the outset of the campaign, Oswald Zimmermann and other Reform Party members opposed it.

Third, there was little consensus about how "the state" would be "supported" by two groups of candidates who were almost indistinguishable: antisemitic Conservatives and Conservative antisemites. The *Dresdner Nachrichten* listed many candidates of the "parties of order" as "antisemitic-conservative" or "conservative-antisemitic."<sup>136</sup> So did the weekly campaign reports of district governors and election posters for the individual candidates. At the eleventh hour even *Das Vaterland* lobbied in this spirit for the Conservative candidates in 3: Bautzen and 4: Dresden-New City (both of whom lost to more radical antisemites the next day): "Count [Ferdinand] zu Lippe and District Court Judge [Martin] Rosenhagen are widely known as energetic antisemites; the former does not belong to the Conservative State Association because it is not antisemitic enough for him, and the latter stands very close to the well-known Dresden antisemites objectively and personally."<sup>137</sup> Zimmermann's *Deutsche Wacht*

<sup>133</sup> KHM Hausen (Dresden) to MdI, 9.6.93, SHStAD, MdI 5385.

<sup>134</sup> Police report of 10.6.93, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 95, Nr. 15546.

<sup>135</sup> Du Bois, "Condition," 174f.

<sup>136</sup> *DN*, 18.5.92, with Dönhoff, 18.5.93, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 12. Those listed by the *DN* as "antisemitic-conservative" included Lippe (3: Bautzen), Rosenhagen (4), Wetzlich (5). Those listed as "conservative-antisemitic" included Mehnert (7) and Opitz (22). Variations used in other Saxon constituencies were "*Cartellverein*" (in Saxony 1), "*Cartellparteien*" (19), "antisemitic-agrarian party" (11), "German Social-conservative" (12 and Eduard Ulrich in 15: Chemnitz), "antisemitic-People's Party" (8), and "agrarian party-conservative" (23).

<sup>137</sup> *Vaterl.*, 14.6.93; cf. KHMS Bautzen to MdI, 3.6.93, SHStAD, MdI 5385; Otto Richter, *Geschichte*, 94.

had no patience with Conservatives trying to jump on the antisemitic bandwagon. As one of its headlines proclaimed, "Make Way!"<sup>138</sup>

Did antisemitic Conservatives have to abandon their ties to the Saxon establishment to conjure up the Jewish threat? Did they risk alienating a significant block of pro-Jewish Saxons among their potential voters? They did not. The British envoy Strachey correctly observed that "the monomania of Ahlwardt infects . . . almost the entire Conservative electorate" in Saxony. But it went further, toward the center of the political spectrum. "Jealousy of the Jews as unbelievers, as capitalists controlling the stock exchange, as middlemen intruding between producer and purchaser, as liberal journalists and parliamentary leaders, is not without ramifications in the National Liberal Party." In his draft report to London Strachey wrote:

In this kingdom, the ~~ignorant~~ unintelligent classes—I mean the entire aristocracy and gentry, and court (the Royal Family excluded)—with the military and civil services, and no small number of traders and peasant proprietors, are in complete sympathy with the "Jew-Baiter" [Ahlwardt] . . . In the social circles to which I properly belong here, approval of the "Jew-Baiter" is absolutely universal: I have just heard from a [higher civil servant] the opinion that, after all, "there is probably something in it."<sup>139</sup>

Another diplomat reported that antisemitic Reform candidates had won over "all those dissatisfied elements of the *Mittelstand* who do not fit within Social Democracy and do not want to belong to it." The Reformers' appeal in 1893 confirmed the Saxon people's "particularly well-honed hatred of the Jews." But it reached much higher. On election day, a chief of the royal household in Dresden gathered together officials and servants of the court and instructed them to make use of their right to vote. He declared that he wanted to exert no election influence, but wished to tell them that he intended to vote for the Conservative candidate. "To this a large number of his subordinates replied that they would give their votes to the candidate of the Reform Party, 'because the Conservatives aren't energetic enough in taking a firm line toward the Jews.'"<sup>140</sup>

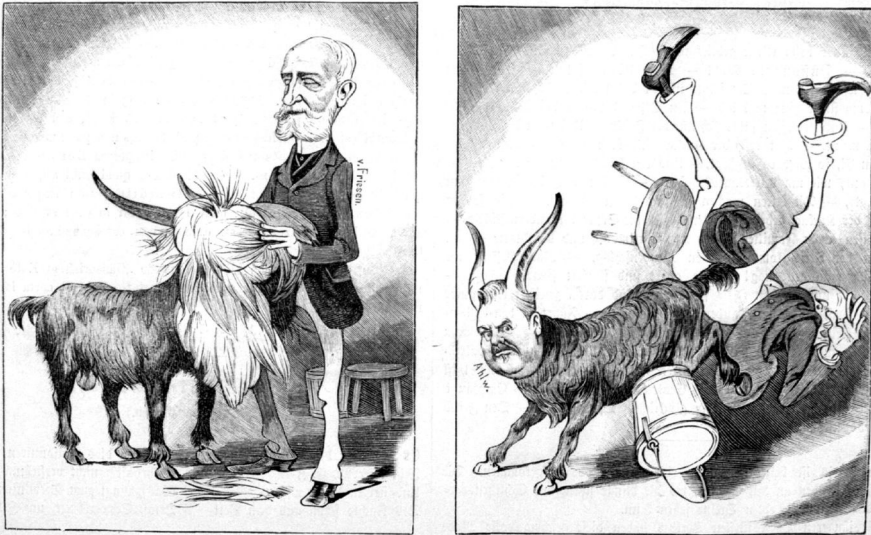
During the nine-day interval between the main election and the run-offs in June 1893, Friesen-Rötha issued a confidential circular that focused on those constituencies where Reformers seemed poised to "steal" Conservative seats.<sup>141</sup> The Reformers, he claimed, had infected the Saxon *Mittelstand* with the ideals of Social Democracy; they had employed the "old democratic rhetoric" familiar from 1848; and now they threatened the existing social and political order. If the circumstances demanded it, Conservatives might have to abstain, as a "patriotic necessity," even in a run-off between a Reformer and a Social Democrat. But Friesen's bluster rang hollow. Around this time, he was lampooned as the unwilling patron of rabble-rousing antisemites.

<sup>138</sup> DW, 14.5.93, cited in PAS, 107.

<sup>139</sup> Strachey, 10.12.92 (draft).

<sup>140</sup> Recounted in Dönhoff, 20.6.93, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 13.

<sup>141</sup> Circular (16.6.93) in SStAL, RG Rötha, Nr. 1576. Cf. *Vaterl.*, 23.6.93.



**Figure 6.3.** Two Antisemites: Hermann Ahlwardt and Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha. Apparently referring to Ahlwardt, the caption reads, “Well, that’s the way he is!” Note the similarity of the two figures’ legs and feet.

Source: Unidentified cartoon in SStAL, Rittergut Rötha, Nr. 1576.

One cartoon shows Hermann Ahlwardt as a goat being fed by the dignified Friesen: when he is unmasked, Ahlwardt refuses to be domesticated (Figure 6.3).

How well did Saxony’s Kartell function in the Reichstag elections of June 1893? The answer depends, as we have already noted, on how the Kartell was defined by contemporaries at the time and by historians since. Generally, the Saxon Kartell was believed to include both shades of left liberals (Progressives and Radicals) and both shades of independent antisemites (German Socials and German Reformers). These were described as non-socialist and anti-socialist parties in 1893. Yet contemporaries agreed that the Kartell was more or less irrelevant in the campaign: it was the “parties of order” that “state-supporting” voters were asked to vote for, and those parties were fighting more than one kind of “disorder”—“revolutionary” socialism and “destructive” Judaism. Overall, anti-socialist unity was a rare commodity in 1893: it prevailed in only eight constituencies, of which the SPD won five. In almost all constituencies, it is true, Conservatives and National Liberals avoided competing candidacies. But almost everywhere, one of these two parties faced a Social Democrat *and* an independent antisemite and sometimes a left liberal as well. None of the ridings in the eastern regions of Bautzen and Dresden (Saxony 1–9) demonstrated anti-socialist unity. The situation was somewhat better in and around Leipzig. Dissension among the “parties of order” was muted or eliminated only in the Zwickau region. There, Social Democratic bastions of strength forced the non-socialist parties to nominate “sacrificial lambs” who stood little chance of being elected.

## THE SHOCK OF JUNE 1893

Election victories and defeats are perceived in relative terms and assessed the same way: a local defeat may be offset by a national triumph, an increase in voter support might not be as great as one had hoped. For this reason the shock of 1893 can be seen in more than one light.<sup>142</sup> We should not be too quick to cite the *Kreuzzeitung* editor Hammerstein, who felt the wrong antisemites had made off with the spoils. *The Times* of London wrote that the Conservatives had met their “not unsatisfactory nemesis” at the hands of the independent antisemites, whom the Conservatives had “dry-nursed” to their own undoing.<sup>143</sup> But in Dresden, another sentiment was voiced more often: *It could have been worse*.

Indeed it could have. The national picture changed much less dramatically in 1893 than it had in 1890. The former Kartell parties recouped some of their losses nationally. Overall turnout rose only slightly over 1890: this time the participation rate in Saxony was only about 7 percent higher than the national average, not 10 percent higher as in 1890. Even though the Social Democrats registered strong gains, the rate of increase had slowed. Having won about 1.4 million votes in the Reich and roughly 241,000 votes in Saxony in 1890, Social Democrats won “only” 1.8 million votes in the Reich and 270,000 votes in Saxony in 1893 (see Table 6.2).<sup>144</sup>

The most dramatic change was the national profile and potential influence of the antisemitic movement. It increased its representation in the Reichstag from five deputies in 1890 to sixteen in 1893. This was headline news. Liebermann, Fritsch, and others complained that far more than sixteen deputies owed their election to the antisemites. Their complaint was not just a footnote to the election, as the Saxon case showed. Official statistics under-reported the antisemitic vote because seven elected deputies had run under the German Social banner but joined the Conservatives’ Reichstag caucus. According to one calculation, the German Reformers, German Socials, and Christian Socials—the independent antisemites—actually attracted 342,425 votes, or 4.4 percent of the Reich total. Fritsch optimistically put the antisemites’ “true strength” at 400,000 votes.<sup>145</sup> Either way, official statistics recorded that antisemites did very well in Saxony. Having won just 4,788 votes in 1890, or less than 1 percent of the total, they won 93,364 votes in 1893, almost 16 percent. This success increased the standing of Saxon antisemites nationally.<sup>146</sup> Six of sixteen antisemites in the Reichstag represented

<sup>142</sup> Nuanced discussions in Levy, *Downfall*, 93–101; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 85–95; Sperber, *Voters*, 212–23.

<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, 18.6.93, cited in Pulzer, *Rise*, 115.

<sup>144</sup> See maps showing Reichstag elections and party bastions in Saxony (1893) in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. Whereas eighteen of twenty-three constituencies were bastions of the Kartell in 1887, all four bastions in 1893 were won by the SPD. See also the Online Supplement for a map published by the Royal Statistical Office, showing all 397 RT election results in the Reich (1893).

<sup>145</sup> Sperber, *Voters*, 217, follows Levy, *Downfall*, 90.

<sup>146</sup> In 1890, one of every ten votes cast for an antisemitic candidate in the Reich was cast in Saxony; in 1893 that proportion had risen to one in three.

Table 6.2. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1890 and 1893

	20 February 1890			15 June 1893		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives (1) (4)	160,407	28.0	13 (12)	147,772	24.9	6
National Liberals (2)	112,514	19.7	3	49,554	8.4	2
Left Liberals (3)	52,776	9.2	1	30,203	5.1	2
Antisemites	4,788	0.9	0	93,364	15.8	6
Social Democrats (4)	241,187	42.1	6 (7)	270,654	45.7	7
Total votes cast/seats	574,974		23	594,506		23
Turnout (%)	82.0			79.9		
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	895,103	12.4	73	1,038,353	13.5	72
Free Conservatives	482,314	6.7	20	438,435	5.7	28
National Liberals	1,177,807	16.3	42	996,980	13.0	53
Left Liberals (3)	1,307,485	18.0	76	1,091,677	14.8	48
Antisemites (5)	47,536	0.7	5	263,861	3.4	16
Social Democrats	1,427,298	19.7	35	1,786,738	23.3	44
Total votes cast/seats	7,261,659		397	7,702,265		397
Turnout (%)	71.6			72.5		

*Notes:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. For the Reich: caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*); Left Liberals include Liberals, Progressives, Radicals, and the People’s Party. The Catholic Center Party, ethnic minorities, and smaller groups have been omitted for the sake of clarity. See RT election results online in the tables provided by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>. (1) 1893: Sachße in 10: Döbeln was a “guest” of the DKP caucus. (2) Hasse in 12: Leipzig-City was a “guest” of the NL caucus. (3) Saxony 1893: Buddenberg in 1: Zittau and Herzog in 2: Löbau were FrVP. (4) The Cons. Kurtz had been replaced by the SD Hofmann in a by-election (15.3.92) in 22: Auerbach. (5) Saxony and the Reich 1890: Antisemites; Saxony 1893: German Reform Party (Antisemites).

*Sources:* “Statistik der allgemeinen Wahlen für die VIII. Legislatur-Periode des Reichstags im Jahre 1890,” *SBDR*, 8. LP, I. Session (1890–91), Anlage Nr. 35; “Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1893,” *SBDR*, 9. LP, II. Session (1893–94), Anlage Nr. 46; RWA, 40, 89; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 276–303.

Saxon constituencies, and all six belonged to the more radical Reform wing of the movement.

Antisemitic gains cannot be mapped directly onto Conservative losses. To be sure, Saxon Conservatives saw their Reichstag caucus cut in half, from twelve to six. The parallelism seemed exact: antisemitic seats in Saxony rose from zero to six. However, many of the votes Conservatives lost to antisemites in eastern Saxony were compensated by votes Conservatives took from the liberal parties elsewhere in the kingdom. Overall the Conservatives’ share of the vote in Saxony declined only modestly: from 28 percent in 1890 to 25 percent in 1893. Relatively, National Liberals and left-liberal losses were much worse. National Liberals won less than half as many votes as they had in 1890. Left liberals lost more than two-fifths of their previous support. The Social Democratic vote rose by 12 percent from 1890



to 1893, but in the Reich it rose twice as fast, by 25 percent over 1890.<sup>147</sup> Of course the SPD's share of the total vote in Saxony was far higher than the Reich average—almost twice as high (46 percent compared to 23 percent nationally). But the SPD did not increase its Saxon representation in the Reichstag: its number of seats remained at seven.

Conservatives were initially self-reflective in their post-election assessments.<sup>148</sup> They were licking their wounds. Soon they counted up the number of Saxon deputies likely to support a new Army Bill and things looked brighter. They could reasonably expect new initiatives against Jewish immigration to reach the floor of the next Reichstag session without having to take on the odium of sponsoring them themselves. And they had glimpsed the potential benefit of Agrarian League agitators who, in the future, might help them achieve “good” election outcomes, defeat “bad” trade treaties, and blame everything on the Jews.

Just as interesting is the equanimity with which King Albert, government leader Metzsch, and others accepted the six antisemitic victories. Metzsch and the Saxon king agreed that Reform Party deputies were preferable to Social Democrats—by a considerable margin. According to Metzsch, “the successes of the Reform Party are not unfortunate to the degree that has been claimed.” He continued: “one can work with the Reform Party with respect to the Army Bill, whereas no negotiations are possible with those other parties.” Almost the same words were used by the king to sum up the new situation: “Of course it is too bad that the Conservatives have lost a number of seats; however, the fact that [those seats] have gone over to the Reform Party and not to the Social Democrats is fortunate, especially for the Army Bill, insofar as the Reformers are open to persuasion.” All in all, King Albert expressed his satisfaction that “his people in Saxony” had done their duty.<sup>149</sup>

The Austrian envoy agreed. Although the Conservatives had suffered a setback, the antisemitic movement had “prevented a major growth of Social Democracy because it knew how to win supporters among the lowest circles of society.” For proof he pointed to the antisemites’ divergent fortunes in Berlin and Dresden. In the Reich capital, with its population four times as large as Dresden’s, the antisemites won about 9,000 votes; in Dresden, the antisemites received about 24,600 votes and the Social Democrats about 29,000.<sup>150</sup> August Bebel reached the same conclusion. He was surprised not only by what the statistics told him but what he had heard on the campaign trail. Two days after the run-offs he wrote, “We are not satisfied . . . with the outcome of the elections. We have won neither more votes, as was expected, nor seats . . . We were somewhat spoiled by the success of 1890 . . . This time an uncommonly large number of candidates were nominated, and thus every social subclass had a man who pretended to support its special interests;

<sup>147</sup> The SPD's share of the vote rose from 42.1 percent to 45.7 percent in Saxony, from 19.7 percent to 23.3 percent in the Reich.

<sup>148</sup> “An die Mitglieder des Conservativen Vereins zu Dresden” [Mehnert], 25.6.93; StadtAD, Kaps. 136.

<sup>149</sup> Chotek, 26.6.93, HHStAV, PAV/48; Strachey (draft), 29.6.93.

<sup>150</sup> Chotek, 16/26.6.93, HHStAV, PAV/48.

this . . . probably denied us many votes we might otherwise have won.”<sup>151</sup> Bebel might well have been thinking of the contests that pitted Social Democrats against German Reformers in eastern Saxony—each trying to win over farmers, *Mittelständler*, and those recalcitrant royal servants: “I heard artisans say: You [the SPD] explain in detail that you cannot help us; we do not wish to go under, so we vote for the antisemites, who promise to help us. It’s the same with the small peasants.”<sup>152</sup>

The severe losses by the Saxon liberal parties in 1893 signaled a rightward shift among Protestant middle-class voters that continued in later elections. But the lower-middle classes and the non-Social Democratic working classes in Saxony seem to have contributed at least as much, and maybe more, to the Conservatives’ relatively stable vote total and the antisemites’ success. The political wandering of voters who had been mobilized for the first time in 1887 (as patriots) and 1890 (in protest) accelerated in 1893. According to one analysis, which is buttressed by Bebel’s anecdotal evidence, 12 percent of German voters who had supported Social Democratic candidates in 1890 chose either the Conservatives or the antisemites in 1893—“the single highest movement from the extreme left to the right at any two elections in the history of the empire.”<sup>153</sup> This movement was much more pronounced in non-Prussian territories (16 percent) than in the Junkers’ Prussian bastions (3 percent). Paradoxically, the 1893 Reichstag elections in Saxony reflected both a national trend and a regional peculiarity. Yet the Saxon king’s satisfaction that “his” Saxons had done their duty in 1893 bears repeating, for those loyal voters had delivered more than half (twelve) of all Saxon seats to the two parties—Conservatives and Reformers—who were avowedly antisemitic. Those twelve deputies had garnered over 240,000 votes between them, representing over 40 percent of all votes cast in Saxony.

## RECRIMINATIONS

During the second half of 1893 and into 1894, Friesen-Rötha and other Conservative leaders escalated their criticism of the antisemitic Reform Party. In August 1893, Paul Mehnert referred to the German Reformers as “wild anarchists.”<sup>154</sup> A few months later an official Conservative proclamation denounced the Reform Party for its “selfish ambition,” its “immoderate and impossible demands,” and its preference for “noise and scandal.” These complaints were not new; but increasingly Saxon Conservatives attacked “the twin faces of anarchy,” lumping Social Democrats and independent antisemites together. When they did so they created a “sensation.”<sup>155</sup> Little wonder. The Saxon Right seemed to have performed an about-face. While Social Democracy remained its primary enemy, the secondary enemy had changed from the Jews to their most radical enemies.

The Conservatives’ attempt to distance themselves from the “immoderate” Reform Party might have brought them closer to their old Kartell allies, the

<sup>151</sup> Bebel to Hermann Schüter, 26.6.93; BARuS, 5:38.

<sup>152</sup> Bebel to Engels, n.d., cited in Sperber, *Voters*, 219.

<sup>153</sup> Sperber, *Voters*, 219. <sup>154</sup> Mehnert to Stöcker, 5.8.93, cited in Lexikon, 1:85.

<sup>155</sup> *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 7.12.93; Chotek, 7.12.93, HHStAV, PAV/48.

National Liberals and the Progressives. The Saxon government would have welcomed this development. But three factors disrupted anti-socialist unity after 1893. First, in the winter of 1893/94, conflict raged between the Conservatives and the Saxon state ministry. Government leader Metzsch condemned Conservatives with the same charge of “demagogy” they were leveling at the German Reformers. The Conservatives had launched a vitriolic attack on the government for its alleged inaction against the Social Democrats and its refusal to invoke exceptional laws. In *Das Vaterland* the Conservatives warned Metzsch that their patience was exhausted: “The consciousness of power’s plenitude is good, but its mere existence is not enough; it must also be palpable. The first duty of the state is self-preservation. A diminished instinct for self-preservation is a sign of weakness. Our times demand tough-minded men, iron counts. Become hard, landgrave, become hard!”<sup>156</sup>

Second, the campaign leading to the Landtag elections of 19 October 1893 again found the “parties of order” in disarray.<sup>157</sup> Although the Saxon Kartell had been resurrected a few weeks earlier, Metzsch was gravely worried because each party was preparing its own election manifesto. The Conservatives feared a further defection to the ranks of the antisemites and so were proclaiming their renewed determination to solve the Jewish question by seeking a ban on Jewish immigration. Metzsch was especially incensed that he was forced—during the Landtag campaign itself—to defend Saxony’s Association Law in the face of attacks from both the Right and the Left. Meanwhile the antisemites were quarreling among themselves and Social Democrats were focusing on a fairness issue that seemed likely to yield votes in the future: Saxony’s Landtag suffrage. The SPD advocated the elimination of the three-Mark tax threshold for enfranchisement, expansion of the passive suffrage to all men over the age of twenty-five (regardless of income), and elimination of any distinction between urban and rural constituencies. This same voting system, the SPD claimed, should be introduced for all local elections, both in the cities and in the countryside.

Third, when the Landtag election polls closed in October 1893, the antisemites had more than doubled their showing over 1891, winning 4,053 votes. Again the “parties of order” had averted the worst.<sup>158</sup> Even though the SPD’s Landtag caucus rose from eleven to fourteen members in the eighty-member Landtag, its share of the vote fell off slightly.<sup>159</sup> The antisemites “stole” only two seats from the Conservatives. Yet the antisemites had again paved the way for SPD victories in a number of constituencies, including one in Dresden. Not only Saxon patriots were discouraged. So was the Prussian envoy Dönhoff: “The Saxon capital and princely

<sup>156</sup> Dönhoff, 9/22/28.12.93, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 17, with newspaper clipping, “*Landgraf werde hart.*” Cf. Dönhoff, 9.1.94, *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> For the following, Dönhoff, 29.9.93, 21.10.93, 9/22/28.12.93, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 17; Dönhoff, 15.11.93, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>158</sup> See the map showing Saxon Landtag elections in 1889, 1891, and 1893 in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>159</sup> From 34 percent in 1891 to 32 percent in 1893.

residence will now enjoy the dubious honor of being represented in the Landtag for six years by an unknown Social Democratic potter.”<sup>160</sup>

Government leader Metzsch and the Conservatives agreed that the Reform Party, a “demagogic party,” was doing the work of the SPD under the “mantel of loyalty.”<sup>161</sup> Reformers seemed immune to those statesmanlike arguments that routinely pulled Conservatives back from the brink of opposition. When Metzsch dressed down Friesen-Rötha for the Conservatives’ recent attacks on the government, the Conservative chairman promised to rein in his followers. By contrast, when Metzsch summoned the prominent Dresden Reformer Gustav Hartwig for a personal audience, Hartwig was unapologetic: “Social Democracy,” he declared, “is not yet the worst, by a long shot.”<sup>162</sup>

\*

By early 1894, German authoritarianism had been under siege for four years since Bismarck’s departure. Its face had been transformed by crisis and doubt. But it stood poised to fight old battles with new weapons. A plan to refocus attention on the threat of “revolutionary” Social Democracy had already begun to form among Saxon politicians and statesmen. That plan was not debated on the hustings or formulated on the floor of the Landtag. It was nurtured in secret communiqués and meetings among party leaders and higher civil servants, not only in Dresden but also in Berlin. Even Paul Mehnert could not have foreseen the opportunity that arose in 1895 to stop the advance of Social Democracy in its tracks. When it did, the future course of Germany’s political democratization hung in the balance.

<sup>160</sup> Dönhoff, 21.10.93, cited previously; Niethammer, 25.10.93, BHStAM II, MA 2862.

<sup>161</sup> Dönhoff, 9.12.93, cited previously; *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 7.12.93.

<sup>162</sup> Dönhoff, 21.10.93, cited previously.

## 7

# Suffrage Reform as Coup d'État

Saxons who for many years had dedicated themselves to defeating Germany's "inner enemies" embraced Kaiser Wilhelm II's call in September 1894 for a crusade "for religion, morality, and order." This crusade promised to refocus middle-class fears on the threat of socialism. It would distract attention from vexing questions raised by radical antisemitism. And it would *not* hinge on winning Reichstag elections, reorganizing the right-wing parties at the grass-roots level, or embracing demagoguery. By means of suffrage reform and a coup d'état against the Reichstag, radical antisemitism would be tamed and revolutionary socialism defeated.

In this volatile political situation, Saxon state ministers, their advisors, parliamentarians, and Saxon King Albert all believed they had special insight to offer the rest of Germany. As they deliberated, their overarching goal was to devise a new voting system that would prevent Social Democrats from winning a majority of seats in parliament.

Saxons demonstrated that the expansion of voting rights could be slowed and actually reversed. In 1896 they legislated a new suffrage that answered the question swirling in Berlin ministries and the Kaiser's court: What is to be done?<sup>1</sup> By 1901 Conservatives had gained hegemony in Saxony's parliament. Their achievement did not go unnoticed in other parts of the Reich, for they had learned, and demonstrated, an important lesson: victory in the war on democracy would only be possible with a coordinated attack at the local, regional, and national levels.

### "FOR RELIGION, MORALITY, AND ORDER"

All these men [the liberals] regard as revolutionary the abolition of anciently established institutions and evils, whereas by counter-revolution they understand the restoration of these or of other abuses. Their adversaries, on the other hand, understand by revolution the aggregate of all the follies and crimes that have ever been committed, whereas by counter-revolution they mean the re-establishment of order, of authority, of religion, and so on.

—Friedrich von Raumer, *Briefe aus Paris und Frankreich im Jahre 1830*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a previous essay, drawing on John Röhl's generous advice, I devoted more attention to views and decisions in Berlin than I can here; see Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, 45.

The Universe of Discourse . . . places importance and urgency on short-term events . . . There's also a predisposition to provide simple explanations for complex events—a cause for every effect. The result is a pulsing desire to adjust our investments to what's going on in the world. To take action.

—Tom Bradley, 2016<sup>3</sup>

To ask whether the “reactionary ’90s” were really so reactionary after all is to pose the wrong question. The Kaiser’s most reactionary plans, we are told, were defeated or radically undercut by liberals. True enough. The liberals’ success in defending popular rights deserves our attention. Nevertheless, legislative “stalemate”<sup>4</sup> does not properly describe the outcome of these battles. It may apply reasonably well to the national scene; but stalemate can have long-term ramifications that reveal the debilitating consequences of political stasis and lost opportunities. The notion of stalemate (or standoff) is even less convincing at the sub-national level. In Saxony, leaders of the *bürgerlich* parties were willing to contemplate a fight to the finish with the “party of revolution.” So were Saxon statesmen and their king. They advised Prussian and Reich officials in Berlin to steer toward such a showdown sooner rather than later.

#### NATIONAL AGENDAS, LEGISLATIVE STALEMATE?

“The Kaiser is like a balloon,” Bismarck once remarked; “if you do not hold fast to the string you never know where he will be off to.”<sup>5</sup> The comparison is suggestive. Between 1894 and 1900 Wilhelm II floated many trial balloons, which were allowed to drift in troubling directions: toward street battles with Social Democrats, possibly leading to bloodshed or civil war; toward serial dissolutions of the Reichstag, possibly leading to the revision of universal suffrage; toward strict new provisions for the Criminal Code or laws of association and assembly, possibly leading to stronger influence for the Church, censors, and the police. The fate of these trial balloons depended on where and how they were moored in German political culture (in Prussia, in the courts, in local administration, in the realm of public opinion).

Conservatives used apocalyptic terms to describe everything they disliked about Chancellor Caprivi’s New Course. Expressing moral outrage they lined up in support of the Lex Heinze—a term that subsumes an initial scandal, a series of legislative bills, and a public debate that dragged on from 1892 to 1900. The murder trial of a Berlin pimp (named Heinze) had prompted Caprivi’s government to introduce a bill imposing stiff penalties on a range of morally offensive practices, most of them sexual in nature. The bill was hijacked by the Catholic Center Party and moral crusaders, who wanted to extend its purview to censorship of the theater. Liberal academics, writers, artists, and journalists saw it as a litmus test whether the rule of law in Germany would protect artistic and scholarly freedom or serve the repressive instincts of the Kaiser. The opposition ensured that only a rump bill passed in 1900.

<sup>3</sup> On Pierre Bourdieu and financial investing; *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) online, 24 March 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Turk, “Line,” 316.

<sup>5</sup> Röhl/Sombart, *Wilhelm II*, 155.

Dreams that Wilhelm II would inaugurate a “social monarchy” were already dashed by 1894, when the so-called Stumm era began. Named after the Saar industrialist Baron Carl Ferdinand von Stumm-Halberg, an influential member of the Free Conservative Party, it was characterized by harsh workplace policies designed to limit the growth of the Social Democratic trade union movement and preserve the *Herr-im-Haus* model of industrial relations. As a representative of heavy industry put it, “the workshop and the army are very much alike in that strict discipline must prevail for all classes.”<sup>6</sup> One Conservative denounced the whole idea of social reform as “fanatical humanitarianism.”<sup>7</sup> By the end of the decade, echoes of the Stumm era could still be heard in the Hard Labor Bill, introduced into the Reichstag in May 1899. This bill would have punished all those who attempted to resist or break up strikes and other forms of industrial action with hard labor in a workhouse. It was reluctantly supported by Chancellor Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (served 1894–1900). Again socialists and liberals isolated the Conservatives and defeated the bill.

Lack of tangible action against Social Democrats and independent antisemites in the wake of the 1893 Reichstag election, together with Caprivi’s tepid responses to agrarian appeals, put Conservatives in the right frame of mind to respond positively when Wilhelm II made a peace offering in the autumn of 1894. In May and June 1894 law-abiding citizens in European capitals were shocked by a wave of anarchist attacks. These included the attempted assassination of the Italian premier Francesco Crispi and the stabbing death of French President Sadi Carnot by an Italian revolutionary on 24 June 1894. Bombs were set off in London and Paris, Pilsen and Prague. Barcelona’s governor was shot, Chicago’s mayor murdered in his home. As anarchists became the target of legislation in Europe, Britain, and the United States, characteristically the Kaiser wanted Germany to take the lead.

Wilhelm telegraphed Chancellor Caprivi that an anti-anarchist bill should be prepared for the Reichstag with the utmost haste.<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm warned Caprivi that although the Social Democrats would try to distance themselves from the anarchists, the two groups had to be “thrown into one pot.”<sup>9</sup> In October 1894, however, the Prussian state ministry backed Caprivi’s more moderate plans, which steered clear of a new Anti-Socialist Law. Meanwhile the battle against revolution had become hopelessly enmeshed with court and ministerial intrigues, which led to the appointment of the seventy-five-year-old Hohenlohe as chancellor at the end of October. Part of the Kaiser’s frustration was that it was taking so long for his ministers to formulate concrete plans against Social Democracy. As one insider reported from Berlin, the more Wilhelm saw signs of a vigorous response to the threat of revolutionary violence, “the more he likes it.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Beumer cited in Stegmann, “Interests,” 163.

<sup>7</sup> Baron Wilhelm von Minnegerode-Rositten (Jan. 1893), cited in Nichols, *Germany*, 258.

<sup>8</sup> Relevant documents in BAP, Rkz 755/1.

<sup>9</sup> See Gabriel, *Assassins*, esp. chs. 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> Saxon envoy to Prussia, Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen (Berlin), to Saxon government leader and MdAA Georg von Metzsch (Dresden), 14.9.94, 29.10.94, SHStAD, MdAA, GsB 3305.

With obvious lack of enthusiasm, Hohenlohe reverted to part of the Kaiser's original plan and introduced an Anti-Revolution Bill into the Reichstag in December 1894. Again, leftist critics helped defeat the bill, in May 1895. The Kaiser's anger was palpable. In a telegram he shot off to Hohenlohe upon hearing the news, he wrote, "Now we are left with fire hoses for ordinary situations and grapeshot as a last resort."<sup>11</sup> Through 1895 tensions between the Kaiser and the Social Democrats escalated on many fronts. Wilhelm instructed his minister of the interior, Ernst von Köller, to accomplish what he could within the limits of Prussia's own Association Law. Wilhelm seemed to have found his man—"one of my staunchest Prussian Conservatives," the Kaiser boasted to envoys from the liberal south-German states.<sup>12</sup> In August 1895 Wilhelm instructed Köller to proceed with all means at his disposal to open the "firefight" with Social Democracy. He was to use "pitiless brutality."<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, strikes were breaking out on the Hamburg docks, and memoranda kept arriving from the former Chief of the Prussian General Staff, Count Alfred von Waldersee: each one was more insistent that a showdown should be initiated before it was too late. These developments added fuel to the fire as Wilhelm announced publicly that the forces of subversion had to be defeated once and for all. The outcome of all this bluster was the Hard Labor Bill, defeated in 1899.

Taking stock of liberal success in defeating reactionary legislation between 1894 and 1900, one scholar has concluded that although public attention was aroused, there was no consensus—even among the right-wing parties—that the state should hit out hard against the "inner enemy." Allegedly, such attention produced the opposite effect: "fear of revolution was not an overriding anxiety of the German people or one which would induce them to accept repression or manipulation."<sup>14</sup> Does this assertion hold water?

#### SAXONS SHOW THE WAY

On a number of fronts Saxons led the charge against subversion. With uncommon consistency, the Saxon king and his ministers assured other monarchs and statesmen that they were ready for a coup d'état against the Reichstag and revision of universal suffrage. With uncommon unanimity, Saxon civil servants, police commissioners, party spokesmen, and civic leaders urged Saxon statesmen to retain the "Saxon Jewel"—the 1850 Association Law—supplementing it where possible with new ordinances or creative interpretations of the Criminal Code to combat Social Democracy. With uncommon alacrity, Saxons revised suffrage laws to disadvantage Social Democrats seeking election to state and municipal parliaments. And with uncommon success, Saxons demonstrated that a state government, when allied

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm's telegram of 11.5.95, Hohenlohe, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Reichskanzlerzeit*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Baden envoy to Prussia, Eugen von Jagemann (Berlin), to Baden FO, 26.10.94, cited in Röhl, *Germany*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram, 24.8.95, PAAAB, *Europa Generalia*, No. 82, No. 1, Nr. 1 (Geheim), Bd. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Lougee, "Bill," 240; cf. Krug, "Civil Liberties," 354f.



with public opinion and party leaders, could overcome the legislative and constitutional roadblocks that so frustrated reactionaries in Prussia and the Reich. By considering how closely intertwined these developments were at different tiers of politics, we see how the fear of revolution operated in different regions of Germany—and with such different outcomes.

Saxons understood that the authoritarian state and the burgher class had to coordinate their efforts. Even with bayonets and grapeshot, no *coup* against parliament, no roundup of subversives, no abolition of universal suffrage would be possible unless a broader offensive against the “inner enemies of the Reich” mobilized a sympathetic public. By the end of the 1890s, a showdown with anarchists, Social Democrats, and the Reichstag—the “dream-world” that War Minister Fabrice said lay beyond his grasp—had receded into the realm of impossibility. But at mid-decade, that outcome was only one possibility among many.

Right away we can dispense with the notion that a murderous anarchist in June 1894 triggered the Kaiser’s crusade for “religion, morality, and order,” announced that September. A year earlier—on the morning of 6 May 1893, only hours before Caprivi dissolved the Reichstag and launched the national election campaign of 1893—the chancellor held a tête-à-tête with Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch to inform him about his plans and solicit his views.<sup>15</sup> Caprivi wanted to discuss various “remedies” to the Reichstag suffrage, including revision of the equal, the direct, or the secret ballot. Caprivi also wanted to explain the course he might adopt “in the foreseeable future” should the newly elected Reichstag dig in its heels. If it refused to approve military increases, then it would be dissolved again. According to Caprivi, at this point his government and the Reichstag would find themselves in a “principled difference of opinion” that could “only be described as the basis for a conflict.”

Could Germany be ruled at all with the Reichstag “in its present composition”? Caprivi in May 1893 answered his own question with a “no.” He told Metzsch that one would then have to consider “upon which principles one might obtain a popular representation for the Reich . . . that could be expected to approve all necessary funds to govern the Reich and endorse the other necessary legislative measures.” Caprivi explained what suffrage revisions might yield the desired parliamentary representation: “a kind of representation by groups or interests, for example of the sort whereby business, trade, industry, [and] agriculture (agrarians) would find their own special representation in the Reichstag, though if possible by retaining the present general suffrage.” Caprivi also floated the idea that Belgium’s recently-introduced system of plural ballots might be suitable.

Caprivi had a Plan B. He told Metzsch that another way to solve the present difficulties would be “to create a formal conflict, which would find its expression in His Majesty the Kaiser laying down the crown of the German Reich and, with this act—which naturally would require the approval of the federal princes—the Reich

<sup>15</sup> Metzsch, “Promemoria,” 6.5.93, SHStAD, MdAA 1078a. This document casts some doubt on Caprivi’s otherwise deserved reputation for opposing the most reactionary measures proposed by Wilhelm II and others during his chancellorship.

constitution would be abrogated as [Germany's] foundational law, which above all else would overturn the clauses in the Reich constitution about the universal suffrage." This plan would allow the federal princes to include in the new constitution the "guarantees" necessary to ensure that the Reichstag would legislate in the best interests of the Reich.<sup>16</sup> Revision of the Reichstag suffrage or the Reich constitution would only be possible by means of "decree from above." Caprivi ended the conversation by noting that these confidential reflections were "temporarily to be regarded as work in progress." Metzsch was nevertheless asked to convey them to Saxon King Albert.

Neither Metzsch nor Caprivi had reason to expect opposition from his king.<sup>17</sup> The Kaiser was glad that oppositional members of the Reichstag had made the situation "clear-cut" in 1893. "It would be no bad thing if a large number of Social Democrats were to get into the Reichstag," he noted privately, "for it would give the philistines a fright and in the end they would themselves beg the government to free them from the impossible electoral system . . . —and we'll certainly find a way to accomplish that with the Federal Council!"<sup>18</sup> Whether or not Saxon Conservatives knew of Metzsch's conversation with Caprivi, such plans loosened their tongues during the 1893 Reichstag campaign. They lost votes because of "incautious remarks about the alleged inevitability of a coup d'état and a restriction of universal suffrage."<sup>19</sup>

In the second half of 1893 civil servants in Prussia and Saxony redoubled their effort to coordinate anti-socialist initiatives. When Prussian Interior Minister Botho Eulenburg issued a decree to his provincial governors on 29 July 1893, he instructed them to increase their vigilance of Social Democratic activities; but he also reminded them that no success could be expected without the support of loyal burghers. Around the same time the Prussians had asked each federal government to summarize its own experience in combating Social Democracy. Metzsch was one of the first to reply.<sup>20</sup> Long-term success could be expected only from an "outward strengthening of state authority through a change of legislation." Metzsch probably intended the latter phrase to be ambiguous: it could refer to specific new laws or a reform of the legislative apparatus, possibly including the abolition of universal suffrage. Either way, the "order-loving" classes needed to "rouse themselves and join in . . . With the insufficient support that the state is presently able to provide, the parties of order cannot be expected to survive in the long run."

In early 1894 other news from Saxony suggested that "loyal" citizens and the "parties of order" were eager to work with their king and his ministers to achieve what the state alone could not. In January 1894 Saxon Conservatives were "planning the sharpest push forward against the extreme radical and socialist parties."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 2:286–8.

<sup>17</sup> See Nichols, *Germany*, 253; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 2:461–3.

<sup>18</sup> Reported in Baden envoy to Prussia, Arthur von Brauer, to Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden, 7.5.93, Fuchs, *Friedrich I.*, 3:237.

<sup>19</sup> Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Baron Friedrich von Niethammer, 23.6.93, BHStAM II, MA 2862.

<sup>20</sup> Metzsch to Prussian envoy to Saxony, Carl von Dönhoff, 25.10.93; GStAB, GsD, VI, C, Nr. 6; Dönhoff to Caprivi, 31.10.93, BAP, RdI 13687.

<sup>21</sup> Austrian envoy to Saxony, Count Bohuslav Chotek, 13.1.94, HHStAV, PAV/48.

Soon forty-two local councils outside Dresden sent a petition to the Landtag. It asked for relief from SPD “outrages . . . in rural areas and city suburbs,” including protection against SPD boycotts and a larger rural police force. The *Leipziger Zeitung* excerpted the rural councils’ petition at length. In its carefully crafted narrative, evidence of local subversion was reworked to evoke a mood of national emergency.

At nightfall, young men, often in sizable groups, roam the towns, attempting to “insult probable opponents of revolution”—decent people . . . Women walking alone even short distances through parts of town incur the risk that their honor will be severely violated. On Sundays and holidays, groups frequently numbering several hundred persons wander from town to town . . . singing revolutionary songs and blocking the streets, thus forcing anyone coming from the opposite direction to give way . . . They demand that proprietors of dancehalls and their musical bands play revolutionary songs.<sup>22</sup>

The Saxon upper chamber “warmly recommended” the petitioners’ request to the government. Metzsch agreed that the “outrages” cited in the petition were “painted in colors by no means too harsh.” This elicited calls of “Now you’re talking!” and “Bravo!” from the floor. To more calls of “Bravo!” Metzsch’s predecessor as interior minister, Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz, declared that ordinary citizens must take the initiative. “Courage,” he noted, “is just as infectious as fear, or even more so, as one can often observe in war, and I do not know why it should not be possible to awaken this courage little by little in our threatened rural communities.” In accepting the committee’s report, Metzsch sought to deflect blame for the current situation onto Berlin: he expressed the hope that “the Reich government would give up its hesitant, passive stance toward these destructive elements.”<sup>23</sup>

Five weeks later the petition was debated in Saxony’s lower house. A speakers’ dual erupted between the SPD’s Friedrich Geyer and the Conservatives’ Paul Mehnert.<sup>24</sup> Geyer attacked the petition head-on and “plucked it to pieces.” This “urgent cry for help” was nothing more than a charade to increase the police budget, argued Geyer. He mocked the petitioners for seeing—or hearing—the spectre of revolution in the melodies sung in dance halls. Conservatives were simply hoping for violence: “it appears to me that the gentlemen would like to have a small riot, so that a bomb may be thrown (lively objections on the Right), so that we could have a bright and jolly exceptional law.” Geyer finished by demanding that the petition’s authors provide proof of the abuses they cited.

Mehnert did exactly that. In a moment that was almost certainly prearranged for maximum effect, he interrupted his speech to say that he had just been handed a slip of paper citing another example of Social Democratic outrage. “Mayor Förster of Hohnstein,” he read aloud, “while attending a Social Democratic meeting that was dissolved, received four knife wounds and was unable to return to work for a long while.” Mehnert’s second piece of evidence demonstrated the SPD’s brutality

<sup>22</sup> LZ, 16.1.94, Beilage; cf. Chotek, 17.1.[94], HHStAV, PAV/48.

<sup>23</sup> LTAkten 1893/94, I.K., Drucksachen Nrn. 34, 255; SHStAD, Mdl 10989; LTMitt 1893/94, I. K., 1:104–18 (117 for Nostitz) (18.1.94); II.K., 1:767–800 (27.2.94); LZ, 16.1.94, Beilage; Chotek, 17.1.[94], HHStAV, PAV/48.

<sup>24</sup> For the following, LTMitt 1893/94, II.K., 1:767–81, 788–96 (original emphasis).

toward women. A certain Widow Kosche had been approached by a socialist functionary and instructed that she should allow no clergy at her husband's funeral: if she refused she would receive nothing from the socialists' fund to support widows. She eventually agreed, whereupon she was given ten Marks—and "not a Pfennig more." Mehnert provided his third example only after he had shared more stories of betrayal, broken teeth, and Bebel's alleged endorsement of wife-swapping (*"Oh je! Oh je!"* from the Social Democrats"). Mehnert wanted his audience to know that SPD boycotts were implemented "in the most despicable ways" imaginable. In October 1892, the fishmonger Andreas Schulz in Pieschen was visited by two SPD members who insisted he join their party. After refusing, Schulz awoke the next morning to see placards posted along his street calling for a boycott of his wares. Schulz's store railings were "blasted apart," reported Mehnert, and "his shop window was smeared with human excrement." Mehnert urged Saxony's state ministry to provide the "state-supporting" parties with "a wake-up cry." "Gentlemen! *To live means to struggle, and if ever in life it appeared that a struggle appears necessary, so it is in today's struggle for political existence.*"

Saxon impatience with Berlin was also growing. At a cabinet meeting of 24 April 1894, attended by King Albert, Metzsch announced that he intended to introduce a motion in the Federal Council calling for "the sharpest possible measures to combat the spread of Social Democracy." He received unanimous support from others at the meeting. Metzsch "complained as bitterly as possible about the apathy shown by the Reich." Metzsch conceded that the present composition of the Reichstag and the "complaisance" of Caprivi's government would probably defeat his plan; but it might become feasible in the "early autumn" of 1894.<sup>25</sup>

Saxons joined other Germans in calling for swift action against the "inner enemy" after the anarchist murders of mid-1894. Social Democracy was the proper target, but one had to proceed with care: "One must propose measures that are not too broad and not too narrow." A bill directed exclusively against anarchism "would offer too little," but "an anti-socialist law would come too late."<sup>26</sup> Metzsch's ministry therefore wanted to revive bills that had failed before: against freedom of the press (1874) and for amendments to the Criminal Code (1876, 1889). Social Democracy would "hardly have advanced so far" if Reichstag legislators had made use of specific paragraphs in the Prussian Criminal Code of 1851<sup>27</sup> and the Saxon Criminal Code of 1868.<sup>28</sup> Now, however, even these "particularist laws" were not equal to the threat: "further measures must be sought," especially to combat SPD boycotts.<sup>29</sup>

Paul Mehnert and his Dresden Conservative Association were among the first to advocate a rigorous response along these lines. On 3 July 1894, barely a week after the French president was assassinated, Dresden Conservatives drew up a petition

<sup>25</sup> Chotek, 26.4.94, HHStAV, PAV/48.

<sup>26</sup> *Denkschrift* from the Saxon embassy in Berlin, 18.8.94 (copy), BAP, Rkz 755/1.

<sup>27</sup> §§ 100, 101, 102, 135.

<sup>28</sup> §§ 127, 128, 130, 232.

<sup>29</sup> PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, No. 1, No. 3, including Dönhoff, 2/8.11.94, 31.12.94, and other reports on the SPD's successful boycott of the Waldschlößchen Brewery near Dresden. *SAZ*, 28.8.94; *DN* and *DJ*, 18.6.94.

which they planned to forward to the Saxon government, the Reichstag, and the Federal Council after circulating it publicly for signatures. "For years and with incomprehensible leniency," the petition declared, "one has acquiesced as Social Democracy . . . has been able to pursue the extermination of Christian and patriotic sensibility!"<sup>30</sup> Mehnert's petition repeated demands that Saxony's state ministry already advocated: stiff penalties for those who incited class hatred in any form (not only for those calling for violence), protection for businesses threatened by boycott, and harsher punishment of press offences. These demands sounded like an election platform. But no election was in sight in July 1894. The petition's real purpose was to exploit national excitement about anarchism to launch a counter-attack against the other "inner enemy." "Without international Social Democracy, there would not exist any anarchist movement worthy of the name." The state had to strike at socialism first and, through it, at anarchism. "Perhaps it is not too late!"<sup>31</sup>

Chancellor Caprivi believed the Reichstag would never pass legislation akin to the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878. It was wiser to proceed in individual Landtage, he suggested on 16 July 1894. In the Prussian House of Deputies a reliable majority was at hand, and "Saxony has proceeded similarly." Defeat in the Reichstag "would only call forth anarchist agitation," whereas "dissolution of the Reichstag would result in worse elections."<sup>32</sup> On the same day, Wilhelm II dictated a message to Caprivi that also noted Saxon successes. Until legislation could be prepared, police ordinances would have to be strictly enforced. "In Saxony, attempted [SPD] boycotts have been energetically suppressed," noted the Kaiser. From Berlin his interior minister and police chief had told him that the same measures could not be implemented. This was unacceptable, thought Wilhelm. Something *must* be done: "we are in an emergency situation against the anarchists and socialists and we must exploit the current mood of alarm among the *Bürgertrum*." A week later he wrote that "it seems to me possible, for the time being, to achieve what Saxony already has by taking the path of legislation in *Prussia*."<sup>33</sup> August Bebel knew what lay ahead. "Whenever some sort of stupidity takes place in Germany, [our enemies] want to take the lumber to us with a new exceptional law."<sup>34</sup>

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Saxon King Albert arrived in Königsberg on the morning of 4 September 1894—two days before the Kaiser delivered his "crusading" speech. Wilhelm invited Albert to a luncheon with Prussian Interior Minister Botho zu Eulenburg. Both Prussians agreed with Albert's conception of a major initiative against "revolutionary tendencies," *not* in Prussia but in the Reich.<sup>35</sup> "In the course of the Königsberg days," wrote Wilhelm later,

<sup>30</sup> Petition of 3.7.1894, HHStAV, PAV/48.

<sup>31</sup> See Dönhoff, 8/12.7.94, PAAAB, Europa Generalia, No. 82, No. 1, Nr. 1 (Geheim), Bd. 4.

<sup>32</sup> For this and the following see other correspondence (14–16.7.94), *ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Wilhelm II to Botho Eulenburg, 24.7.94, cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 2:607 (original emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> Bebel to Liebknecht, 7.8.94, BARuS, 5:52.

<sup>35</sup> Eulenburg, *Korrespondenz*, 2:1341.

I had an opportunity to speak with the King of Saxony about the possible legislative bills this winter. I was pleased to see how clearly the king understood and had command of the situation and that his views coincided completely with mine. Regarding the initiative against the parties of revolution he came to the following conclusion: The matter must at all costs be regulated nationally [said the Saxon king]. Not through an exceptional law, because one would have no chance of passage. Also not by a Reich association law; it would be a complete impossibility because that would presume the [federal] states would subordinate their own association laws to it. Instead, existing regulations must be strengthened by introducing sharper paragraphs [in the Reich Criminal Code] . . . [The Saxon king] is aware that this might involve a dissolution of the Reichstag, perhaps even two. However, he stated determinedly that if the Reichstag repeatedly refused to pass measures to protect civil society, it had outlived its usefulness. Then the moment would arrive when the bombs have to go off and the Federal Council (that is, the German princes) would have to propose, or promulgate, a new election law. In other words, the *ultima ratio*, a coup d'état.<sup>36</sup>

Up to this point the royal conversation would appear to support the generally accepted notion of a coup d'état coming exclusively from above. But we cannot dismiss as bombast Albert's promise that Saxon burghers would prove as reliable as German monarchs when the final showdown arrived. Albert's views reflected sentiments found at various levels of Saxon political society: in local councils, in Conservative clubs, in the upper house of the Landtag, and among Conservative, National Liberal, and Saxon Progressive deputies in the lower house.

"The law-and-order loving segment of the population," Albert told Wilhelm, "would welcome such a solution," because their "fear of revolution increases daily." On that basis Albert "placed himself and his Saxons" completely at Wilhelm's disposal. The Kaiser then continued his description of the conversation, noting that King Albert "had not the slightest doubt that the Federal Council would concur completely." When Wilhelm asked about Bavaria, Albert said "certainly Bavaria too; he would take care of that personally: things cannot go on like this any longer. I [Wilhelm] could only declare My agreement with everything he said. His Majesty [Albert] expressed the same views to Minister President Count [Botho] Eulenburg<sup>37</sup> . . . The King of Württemberg is of the same mind: as he put it, none of us has sworn loyalty to the Reich constitution, so it can be revised."

Near the end of September 1894, the Kaiser's friend and advisor Philipp zu Eulenburg drew up an *aide-mémoire* outlining the pros and cons of embarking on a coup d'état.<sup>38</sup> The advantages of forceful action were many. The election slogan "War against Revolution" might have appeal, Eulenburg felt. Moreover, the monarchs currently occupying other German thrones made the timing auspicious: "King Albert of Saxony can be counted on, King Wilhelm of Württemberg likewise, and the old Prince Regent of Bavaria is weighed down by great fear of

<sup>36</sup> Telegram, Botho Eulenburg to Caprivi, 8.9.94, in Zechlin, *Staatsstreichpläne*, 189–92; telegram, Wilhelm II to Caprivi, 9.9.94, BAP, Rkz 755/1; cf. Nichols, *Germany*, 340; Röhl, *Germany*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> At this time the offices of Reich chancellor (Caprivi) and Prussian minister president (Eulenburg) were separated.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum, 27.9.94, Eulenburg, *Korrespondenz*, 2:1353–5; cf. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 2:611–13.

the socialists.” However, “in a few years’ time the picture may be quite different. The 3 kingdoms will . . . find themselves governed by princes who are less firm in their convictions, which may rule out fruitful action.” Dangers inherent in this course were also spelled out in Eulenburg’s memorandum. A *coup* against the Reichstag, the constitution, and universal suffrage might inspire liberal parliamentarians in Bavaria and Württemberg to impeach their state ministers (Eulenburg foresaw no such problem for the Saxon king and his statesmen.)<sup>39</sup> Although Eulenburg did not declare himself in favor of one argument over the other, the Kaiser appeared ready to move forward: “he *seems* to want a *decision* . . . His Majesty wants to ‘sort things out.’” When Caprivi warned against a coup d’état, Wilhelm sent him “a long and enthusiastic exposition of the entire coup d’état program which he had agreed with the King of Saxony.”<sup>40</sup>

There is no need to chronicle the events that led to the simultaneous dismissal of Caprivi and Botho Eulenburg at the end of October 1894. The more important question is: Why did King Albert, Saxon Conservatives, and other advocates of a showdown with the “inner enemy” draw back from the brink? The short answer is that they lost faith in the resolve of Berlin statesmen.<sup>41</sup> Before 26 October no one knew who really ruled in the Reich capital. Thereafter, the new chancellor, Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe, made clear his position. “Intervention against Social Democracy is necessary,” he wrote, “but only if it [the SPD] provides a provocation.”<sup>42</sup> Hohenlohe insisted that his mandate was a different one: “to create calm, not to follow a policy of conflict.” Each time the draft Anti-Revolution Bill was amended during the winter of 1894/95, King Albert’s ministers in Saxony distanced themselves further from legislation that would not “get to the root of things.” By January 1895, Albert believed it would be unwise to dissolve the Reichstag over the Anti-Revolution Bill. He was “skeptical of the Kaiser’s idea to dissolve the Reichstag” and he had “counseled the Kaiser not to take advice from strangers but only from responsible ministers.”<sup>43</sup> By that point Albert and his ministers knew that Hohenlohe was no “conflict chancellor.”

Saxony’s “state-supporting” parties did not accept the verdict that public opinion would not condone a course designed to eradicate the poison of Social Democracy. Instead they redoubled their efforts to portray Germany on the brink of disaster. Saxon Conservatives—and all non-socialist deputies in the Saxon Landtag—set about to devise home-grown solutions to the problem of subversion. They did so in political arenas where Saxony was not dependent on Prussia or the Reich for support. As Saxon Conservatives grew more frustrated with lack of action from Berlin, the possibility that they would launch anti-socialist initiatives on their own attracted attention in national party circles and beyond. The Conservative *Reichsbote* usually supported Christian Social efforts to win over workers rather than

<sup>39</sup> Cf. PrStMin meetings of 12/19.10.94; AB-PrStMin, 8/1:163–5; Zechlin, *Staatsstreichpläne*, Appendix 10.

<sup>40</sup> Eulenburg, *Korrespondenz*, 2:1366f.; cf. Born/Rassow, *Akten*, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Stalman, *Hohenlohe*, 231–41; cf. Turk, “Will.”

<sup>42</sup> Which Bebel would not deliver; BARuS, 5:56f.

<sup>43</sup> Journal entry [Jan. 1895], Hohenlohe, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Reichskanzlerzeit*, 31f.

shoot them; but one of its contributors wrote from Berlin that "as far as Saxony is concerned, the deployment of energetic measures accompanied by a bit of bloodshed initially would be the most humane course of action, which could perhaps still stop more extensive calamities and general upheavals." "As repulsive as it sounds," concluded this writer, "one would almost wish for [such] terrible sacrifices."<sup>44</sup>

The Conservatives believed the watered-down Anti-Revolution Bill did not go far enough, and so did Saxon National Liberals. However, like Caprivi and Hohenlohe in the Reich, Saxon liberals received no credit for their anti-socialist rhetoric or their abandonment of older liberal principles. As the British envoy George Strachey noted from Dresden, "By the German aristocratic and official castes, socialists and liberals are habitually spoken of as dogs, or worse," and the Reichstag continued to be described as an assembly of "mere blackguards."<sup>45</sup> The tenor of Saxon public opinion can also be gauged from reactions to a pamphlet published in late 1894 by one of Bismarck's former "press bandits," Constantin Rößler. To address the "sickness of the times," Rößler advocated a dictatorship. If the Reichstag did not pass "comprehensive, effective legislation against Social Democracy," Rößler believed the constitution should be suspended, the Reichstag turned out of doors, and "the Kaiser . . . would assume supreme power for a term of years." Rößler's appeal for emergency measures resonated strongly among Saxon burghers. "At a local meeting which was largely attended by the aristocracy, military, civil servants, and private burghers, a Prussian chamberlain . . . delivered an address along the lines of [Rößler's] pamphlet. His ranting rhetoric was received with enormous applause throughout, which reached a crescendo when he recommended that all socialists condemned under [Rößler's] proposed legislation should, after their punishment by imprisonment at home, be transported to the Bismarck Archipelago or the Cameroons." The National Liberals' *Dresdner Anzeiger* labeled this a "very statesmanlike and important" speech.<sup>46</sup>

Paul Mehnert's Conservative Association in Dresden was just as eager to keep up the pressure on ditherers. The petition it drafted in July 1894 had gathered thousands of signatures by November and was ready to present to the Reichstag and the Federal Council.<sup>47</sup> The manifestos Mehnert circulated to cap this petition campaign suggest that Germans were anything but disinterested in the threat of revolution: "*Everywhere among the good and stalwart kernel of our people there is a longing for a more rigorous law. The system of procrastination and laissez-allez has long since been out of place in the face of a revolutionary party's systematic advance.*" Another circular called on the state to respond in kind to Social Democracy's "campaign of extermination" against the *Mittelstand*. The clear and present danger

<sup>44</sup> Reported in Chotek, 7.7.94, HHStAV, PAV/48. See Plate 6 in this book for the cartoon "The Conservatives' Last Resort." Thomas Theodor Heine used a garish red to depict the torch of war and socialist ballots, allowing him to sketch the apocalyptic vision suggested here by the *Reichsbote*. "Der Ausweg der Konservativen," by Thomas Theodor Heine, *Simplicissimus* 15, Nr. 21 (22.8.10): 341.

<sup>45</sup> Strachey, 15.11.94, PRO, FO 68/179, and for the following on Rößler.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. The Bismarck Archipelago is a group of islands off the northeastern coast of New Guinea in the western Pacific Ocean.

<sup>47</sup> Two manifestos (10.10.94 and n.d.), StadtAL, Kap. 1, Nr. 46 (original emphases).



was emphasized in a refrain that was now familiar to Saxon burghers: "*Things cannot go on like this any longer!*"

When the prospect of socialist victories in the Landtag elections of 1895 began to loom, Social Democrats did not disavow the connection between the outcome of future elections and the Kaiser's famous declaration of 2 September 1895 that they were "scoundrels not worthy to bear the name German."<sup>48</sup> One of the SPD's Saxon election manifestos declared that "*The outcome of the Saxon Landtag elections will give the appropriate answer to the question: 'Can the Social Democratic workers' movement be suppressed by force or not?'*" After noting how ruthlessly the "Saxon Jewel" had been used to dissolve socialist meetings and associations over the past two years, prompting "orgies of celebration by reactionaries," the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* highlighted the kingdom's special status as Germany's most industrialized state. "Saxony is therefore, in effect, the test case for everything that happens to workers. If the Saxon government's system of repression should prove itself viable, the governments of the other federal states will not waste a moment in introducing this system for all of Germany. They would be assured the support of all the non-socialist parties."<sup>49</sup>

## THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

A conservative candidate who should present himself to his electors by declaring to them that he did not regard them as capable of playing an active part in influencing the destinies of the country, and should tell them that for this reason they ought to be deprived of the suffrage, would be a man of incomparable sincerity, but politically insane.

—Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie* (1911)<sup>50</sup>

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.

—H. L. Mencken (1916)<sup>51</sup>

At the ceremonial opening of Saxony's Landtag session in November 1895, storm signals were flying.<sup>52</sup> When the Conservative Gustav Ackermann was again elected president of the House of Deputies and called for the usual oath of loyalty to the

<sup>48</sup> *Vw*, 4.9.95.

<sup>49</sup> *SAZ*, 7.9.95; *Vw*, 20.10.95; cf. Chotek, 4.10.95, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>50</sup> Cited from Michels, *Parties*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> H. L. Mencken, *A Little Book in C major*. Mencken often wrote about democracy's shortcomings, labeling the American public the "booboisie." Mencken's family had been part of the exodus from Germany in 1848 and settled in the German section of Baltimore. Many of Mencken's observations from America in the 1920s are apposite to Imperial Germany. See Cooke, *Mencken*; Williams, *Mencken*.

<sup>52</sup> The following is based on paraphrased speeches and reflections in Dönhoff, 13/14.11.95, 4/5/12/15/19.12.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3; Dönhoff, 21.11.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 18; Diersch, "Entwicklung," 189ff.

Saxon king, the fourteen Social Democratic deputies quickly exited the house. Government leader Metzsch felt the SPD deputies made themselves "laughable" with this fruitless gesture, but he foresaw a difficult session ahead. That Leipzig Police Director Rudolf Bretschneider had recently been the target of an assassination attempt added to the tension.<sup>53</sup>

Within two days of parliament's opening the SPD caucus introduced a motion calling for universal manhood suffrage for Landtag elections and municipal assemblies. The Social Democrats had done so at the opening of each Landtag session almost as long as anyone could remember: the "parties of order" had always moved on to other business. This time those parties responded differently. They went on the offensive. Since Baron von Friesen-Rötha had resigned as party chairman in May 1894,<sup>54</sup> the *de facto* leader of Saxon Conservatives, Paul Mehnert, led the counterattack himself. When the SPD motion came up for debate on 10 December 1895, Mehnert presented his counter-motion. It had just been signed by all members of the Conservative, National Liberal, and Saxon Progressive caucuses. In a polemical speech lasting one and a half hours, Mehnert announced that the Kartell parties had finally accepted their responsibility to respond to an emergency situation.

In his telling, the "parties of order" had had an epiphany.<sup>55</sup> The SPD's continual attempts to transplant the Reichstag suffrage to the Landtag had to be stopped because it would reduce parliament to a forum for demagogues. "On the basis of universal suffrage," declared Mehnert, "the [candidate] who has the greatest success . . . is the one . . . who is the most ruthless in his choice of methods, who piles it on most crudely, and who best flatters . . . the instincts of the people." The "parties of order" had also had a terrible fright: like Dickens's Scrooge, they had glimpsed the future. Social Democratic victories in the Landtag elections of October 1895 and their party's "wild agitation" during that campaign underscored the need for urgent action. If a decisive response were not taken, the "party of revolution" stood poised to win a Landtag majority after the next election. It would then be in a position to introduce the socialist *Zukunftsstaat*.<sup>56</sup>

The "parties of order" in the Landtag had lost patience waiting for statesmen in Berlin or Dresden to act. So they had drawn up a set of general principles on which a Saxon suffrage reform bill should be based: (1) No one who currently possessed the Landtag suffrage should lose it; (2) the distinction between urban and rural constituencies should be preserved; (3) no wholesale re-election of parliament should take place; rather, the system of partial renewal every two years should remain; and (4) in place of direct and unitary voting for deputies, a system of

<sup>53</sup> Dönhoff, 24.10.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Dönhoff, 21.5.94, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 18. Friesen-Rötha's formal successor was the Austro-Hungarian consul general Max Schober, a "well-respected industrialist" from Leipzig.

<sup>55</sup> *LTMit* 1895/96, II.K., 1:163–75 (10.12.95), 166; Dönhoff, 12.12.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>56</sup> "State of the future." Compare the maps showing Saxon LT elections in 1889, 1891, and 1893 (rural and urban) with those showing the LT election of 1895 (rural and urban), in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

indirect multi-class voting should be introduced along the lines of the Prussian three-class suffrage.

Mehnert's tale was plausible. It convinced most Saxon burghers at the time and many historians since.<sup>57</sup> But it was artfully constructed fiction. If the Saxon suffrage of 1868 was about to be "assassinated," this was going to happen with malice aforethought. New evidence shows how assiduously anti-socialist politicians in Saxony had prepared for this moment—not for days or weeks, but for months and years. Mehnert chose the first full day of debate in the Landtag session to throw down the gauntlet. He sought maximum dramatic effect, for instance by conjuring up spine-chilling defamations Germans could expect to hear from Social Democrats when the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Reich was celebrated in January 1896. He also intended his Landtag speech to be a provocation. It served its purpose. The Social Democrats were caught off-guard and they were genuinely outraged.

Some of the preparations for this dramatic announcement had unfolded in public view. Two other components of Saxony's 1896 suffrage reform unfolded behind closed doors. The first was a reform of Leipzig's municipal suffrage. The second was a series of secret memoranda and meetings among parliamentarians, civil servants, and statesmen in Berlin and Dresden.

#### BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

In the Landtag session of 1893/94, Saxony's "parties of order" had consolidated their position. The Saxon Kartell had been renewed in March 1894. A new wrinkle was added. Paul Mehnert took the lead in establishing a Senior Assembly to foster anti-socialist cooperation outside the Landtag. Consisting of four Conservatives, two National Liberals, and two Saxon Progressives, it was clear where the real power lay.<sup>58</sup>

Anti-socialist unity was not watertight. The Berlin leadership of the Agrarian League was notoriously unreliable in its endorsement of local pacts Conservative associations made with National Liberals. For example, in a Reichstag by-election in May 1894 the Conservatives agreed to support the National Liberal candidate. However, the Agrarian League's leaders forced an unnecessary run-off ballot against a socialist when it refused to endorse this arrangement and called on its members to vote instead for the antisemitic candidate. This intervention prompted the Kaiser to write "these asses!" in the margin of his envoy's report.<sup>59</sup> The antisemitic Reformers also continued to lay roadblocks in the path of the "parties of order": in a Reichstag by-election in April 1895, Gustav Hartwig split the non-socialist vote with a

<sup>57</sup> Though not Wolfgang Schröder; see *SParl*, 46. Cf. works by Schimmel, Pache, Oppe, and Karsten Rudolph.

<sup>58</sup> Dönhoff, 18.3.94, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3. Mehnert was the *Geschäftsführer*.

<sup>59</sup> Dönhoff, 26.5.94, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, Nr. 3, Bd. 14.

Conservative-National Liberal compromise candidate and thereby helped a Social Democrat to victory.<sup>60</sup>

In the Landtag elections of October 1895, the SPD had gained only one seat and lost another, leaving its delegation at fourteen members.<sup>61</sup> The Saxon Kartell had dodged another bullet. The election result was “so good that I can hardly believe it,” declared Metzsch. Mehnert exclaimed that the antisemites had elected “*not a single one* of their candidates.” And the last left-liberal Radical had been “commanded out” of the lower house. When Mehnert remarked in private company that he was “completely satisfied with the result,” he mocked his later claim that the election results of 1895 had forced the Saxon Kartell’s hand.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, in October 1895 the Social Democrats polled over 13,000 more votes than they had in the same constituencies in 1889. Because the socialists appeared to have mobilized many supporters for the very first time, this upswing seemed certain to continue. Already, Social Democrats in the Dresden parliament represented more than one-third of socialists sitting in *all* German Landtage. The antisemitic vote rose even more steeply. Having been completely unrepresented in these constituencies six years earlier, they now polled 10,742 votes, roughly 11 percent of the total. Some Conservatives believed a restricted Landtag suffrage would disadvantage the antisemites at the polls at least as much as it would the Social Democrats. This was because the radical antisemites allegedly drew the bulk of their support from the most impoverished and least sedentary elements of the *Mittelstand*. As well, the antisemites were demanding that the Reichstag suffrage be amended to introduce mandatory voting for all enfranchised citizens. Conservatives were divided on the idea of mandatory voting, but on balance they opposed it because it would foster the demagogic cultivation of the electorate.<sup>63</sup>

#### LEIPZIGERS SHOW THE WAY

Between 1 January 1889 and 1 January 1892, seventeen outlying districts were incorporated into Leipzig’s city limits. These were mostly densely populated neighborhoods with large working-class populations. As a result of these incorporations (*Eingemeindungen*), the city’s population jumped 84 percent.<sup>64</sup> Leipzig was now Germany’s fourth largest city after Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich. Saxon Social Democrats and their opponents both knew this development would have electoral consequences. The city council, dominated by Mayor Otto Georgi, was perfectly aware that many more working-class voters would now vote in Leipzig

<sup>60</sup> Dönhoff, 15/17/21.4.95, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 14.

<sup>61</sup> AHMS and KHMS reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5342. A fifteenth SPD MdLT was added in a by-election that winter.

<sup>62</sup> Chotek, 18.10.95; HHStAV, PAV/49; Dönhoff, 18.10.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3 (original emphases).

<sup>63</sup> *Vaterl.*, 18.10.95, 6.3.96; cf. Schorlemer, *Landtagswahlrecht* (1895); [Schorlemer], *Talmi-Antisemitismus* (1895), 28–31; Stölting, *Wahlrecht*, 28; Diersch, “Entwicklung,” 191f.

<sup>64</sup> From 179,689 to 357,122; Wächter, “Städte,” 203, Table 5; Pontow, “Kommunalpolitik,” 105.

municipal elections.<sup>65</sup> Its members hoped that winning new land for the city would allow industry to thrive and produce an economic upswing that would permit them to provide more social services at the local level.<sup>66</sup> For state and national elections, different outcomes could be foreseen.<sup>67</sup> With relatively little controversy, two new Landtag constituencies for Leipzig were added to the existing three in 1892, raising the total number of seats in the Landtag from eighty to eighty-two.

Even before these incorporations were completed, Leipzig's SPD took up the political opportunity provided by Saxony's existing municipal suffrage laws. In autumn 1890, the Leipzig branch of the SPD received about 20 percent of the vote. The National Liberals' *Leipziger Tageblatt* claimed the Social Democrats wanted to impose something akin to the Paris Commune on Leipzig.<sup>68</sup> The next four years were characterized by a campaign to convince workers to apply for citizenship in Leipzig, even though local officials tried to make the application process as difficult as possible.<sup>69</sup> Other indicators reflected the rapid growth of Social Democracy in Leipzig. Between 1893 and 1896 local party membership almost doubled, to over 1,500 members.<sup>70</sup> In these years the SPD's network of cultural, educational, and recreational societies took off.<sup>71</sup> The SPD's Gymnastic Society alone had fifteen clubs in Leipzig with about 1,000 members in 1892.<sup>72</sup> In 1892 the SPD had over seventy taverns at its disposal, and two years later its members could enjoy the benefits of twelve consumers' cooperatives with about 12,000 members. Whereas the local SPD's chief organ *Der Wähler* had a print run of about 3,000 copies in 1887, that number had quadrupled by 1894 when it was renamed the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.<sup>73</sup> Leipzig also provided a base of operations for socialists who carried agitation to the countryside.<sup>74</sup>

The success of Social Democrats in elections to Leipzig's municipal assembly rose correspondingly. If these trends continued, it seemed likely that Social Democrats would eventually dominate Leipzig's parliament (see Table 7.1). To preclude this, Leipzig's city council proposed a new three-class voting system. Because it had become "extremely easy" to win citizenship, Leipzigers faced "the danger . . . that the present election system will lead to a pure domination of the masses."<sup>75</sup> With legislation that passed into law on 24 October 1894, Leipzigers copied the

<sup>65</sup> See Georgi, *Reden*.

<sup>66</sup> Pontow, "Kommunalpolitik," 101; Czok, "Stellung," 8.

<sup>67</sup> See also ch. 11 on these deliberations. I tested ideas found in this section, albeit with different research questions in mind, in Retallack, "Mapping the Red Threat."

<sup>68</sup> *Der Wähler*, 13.11.90, cited in Czok, "Stellung," 36.

<sup>69</sup> Dönhoff, 11/26.10.94, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 18, and for some of the following.

<sup>70</sup> It rose from 872 to 1,584; the latter figure included just 69 women. Leipzig's SPD was now larger than the Leipzig National Liberal Association (957 members in 1890) and the State Association of the Radical Party in Saxony (827 members in 1892). Dönhoff, 28.5.92, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Adam, *Arbeitermilieu*.

<sup>72</sup> Rudloff/Adam, *Leipzig*, 61.

<sup>73</sup> Czok, "Stellung," 13–25; Rosonsky, "Entwicklung."

<sup>74</sup> A total of 160 Social Democrats sat in eighty-three local councils across Saxony, of which seventy-eight were outside the big cities. "Übersicht über die politische und gewerkschaftliche Arbeiterbewegung im 12. und 13. sächsischen Reichstagswahlkreise im Jahre 1895," Leipzig, 1.1.96 (MS.), 2f.; SHStAD, KHMSL 253. These and later reports by *Criminal-Oberwachmeister* (later *Polizei-Inspektor*) Försternberg will henceforth be cited as Fö "Übersicht . . . [year]."

<sup>75</sup> Dönhoff, 11.10.94, cited previously.

Table 7.1. Leipzig Municipal Elections, 1889–93

Year	Enfranchised electors	Votes cast	Votes cast for non-socialist parties	Votes cast for Social Democracy
1889	13,061	6,809	6,795	—
1890	17,697	11,520	9,191	2,329
1891	21,706	14,674	10,361	4,313
1892	22,245	15,245	10,341	4,904
1893	24,308	15,770	9,835	5,935

Source: Leo Ludwig-Wolf, "Leipzig," in *Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsorganisation der Städte*, vol. 4, no. 1, *Königreich Sachsen*, ed. Verein für Socialpolitik (Leipzig, 1905, rpt. Vaduz 1990) (Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, 120/1), 124–61, at 137.

Prussian three-class suffrage—in more ways than one. They adopted a system according to which voters' quantitative contribution to the state, their *Leistung*, could be assessed and rewarded.<sup>76</sup> Thus the three-class suffrage was universal but unequal. Not all voters had equal weight in choosing their parliamentary representatives. In the top voting class were Leipzigers who collectively paid in annual taxes a sum equivalent to five-twelfths of the total tax roll (for Prussian Landtag elections it was one-third). The second class of electors included the next 15 percent of taxpayers. Those remaining on the list, plus all eligible non-taxpayers, constituted the third voting class—roughly 80 percent of all electors. This system reflected popular conceptions of the state as a kind of joint-stock company, whereby political influence was allocated to citizen "shareholders" on the basis of each one's "investment" in the state and the established social order. The emphasis on independence, *Intelligenz*, and concern for the public good corresponded to contemporary understandings of philanthropy itself.<sup>77</sup>

The defenders of the new Leipzig municipal suffrage claimed that all three classes of electors at least had equal weight in choosing the seventy-two municipal parliamentarians. Such arguments were a sham. Each vote cast in Class I carried roughly sixteen times more weight than each vote in Class III.<sup>78</sup> The National Liberals dominated the first voting class, which included representatives of commerce, industry, and the upper reaches of the bureaucracy. Leipzig's conservative Home-Owners Association, allied with *Mittelstand* and antisemitic groups, dominated the second.<sup>79</sup> By introducing a three-class suffrage with a direct voting procedure, the Leipzigers virtually guaranteed that *some* Social Democrats would enter the municipal parliament.<sup>80</sup> In the third class, the Social Democrats were expected to win all the seats. However, two stipulations sought to postpone or prevent this outcome.

<sup>76</sup> The connotations of "*Leistung*" included accomplishment, achievement, capacity, and merit.

<sup>77</sup> Further details in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 6.

<sup>78</sup> StadtAL, Kap. 7, Nr. 36, Bd. 1; Ludwig-Wolf, "Leipzig," esp. 137–40; Schäfer, "Burg," 273–5; Adam, *Arbeitermilieu*, 293–8.

<sup>79</sup> StadtAL, Kap. 35, Nr. 100, Bd. I. Cf. Brandmann, *Leipzig*, 51f.; Schäfer, "Burg"; Schäfer, "Bürgertum"; Schäfer, *Bürgertum*.

<sup>80</sup> Czok, "Stellung," 21; Adam, *Arbeitermilieu*, 296. See Retallack, "Mapping the Red Threat," for further details.

First, seats would henceforth be contested on a two-year rhythm, not annually. Second and more important, Leipzig was divided into four electoral districts, but *only* for the third voting class. These districts had to be drawn from scratch, and they reflected the same political calculus that had determined the boundaries of the five districts for Landtag elections, drawn two years earlier. Four Social Democrats were elected to Leipzig's municipal assembly the first time the new suffrage was tested in 1894. A year later, another six Social Democrats were elected, bringing their total to ten. This outcome was deemed tolerable by Leipzig's suffrage expert on the city council, Leo Ludwig-Wolf, and even by the Prussian envoy: "The elections in the first two classes constitute a counterbalance to . . . the revolutionary ideal."<sup>81</sup>

Saxon anti-socialists quickly deduced that if a restrictive suffrage law achieved its intended goal in Leipzig, it might work elsewhere. It might also help refute the demands raised by August Bebel when he published *Social Democracy and the Universal Suffrage. With Special Attention to the Female Vote and the Proportional Electoral System* in 1895.<sup>82</sup> The plutocratic reform of the Leipzig municipal suffrage set the stage for the Landtag suffrage reform of 1896 and suffrage reforms enacted in other Saxon cities in the coming years.<sup>83</sup>

#### "WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

When the "parties of order" proposed Landtag suffrage reform in December 1895, they had to overcome doubts expressed by government leader Metzsch and even King Albert. The latter was reluctant to "shake the [Landtag] suffrage that had satisfactorily been bearing fruit for sixty years." The independent antisemites were vehemently opposed to reform. Even men of impeccable "conservative monarchical convictions" expressed "serious reservations." Nonetheless, the leaders of the "parties of order" were soon "flattering themselves not only to have worked toward Saxony's salvation but also to have provided an exemplary model for the suffrage in the Reich and the other federal states of Germany."<sup>84</sup>

As it happened, Paul Mehnert had been flattering himself and cajoling others for more than a year. In December 1894—*not* a year later, when he claimed to have had an epiphany—he sent a long memorandum to government leader Metzsch. Its argument combined flexible tactics with firm determination to meet the socialist threat on the Conservatives' own terms. Providing a battle plan to defeat the "inner

<sup>81</sup> Dönhoff, 29.11.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 18; Stadtrat Ludwig-Wolf (Rat der Stadt Leipzig) to Geh. Reg.-Rat Bruno Oswin Merz (Mdl Dresden), 27.12.95, SHStAD, Mdl 5414.

<sup>82</sup> BARuS, 3:613–91, esp. 656–9.

<sup>83</sup> Czok, "Klassenkampf," on Böhlen bei Grimma in 1893; Heinze, "Dresden"; Hübschmann, "Chemnitz." In Dresden and Chemnitz, reformers took into account not only the income and tax exposure of the prospective voter but also his profession and level of education. Thus they resurrected options that Leipzigers had considered too conducive to Social Democratic gains. See chs. 9 and 11 below. Prussia's three-class system was based on Cologne's municipal suffrage of 1845; see Boberach, *Wahlrechtsfragen*.

<sup>84</sup> Niethammer (draft), 11.12.95, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 953.

enemy," Mehnert's memorandum is just as revealing as the final suffrage reform passed into law in March 1896.<sup>85</sup>

Election returns from Landtag voting in the autumn of 1893 "shocked even me," wrote the Conservative leader when he sent them along with his memorandum. Mehnert claimed astonishment that the Kartell's secure majority in the lower house stood on such a "weak footing." Its current two-thirds majority might become "*not even a simple majority*" in the next Landtag elections scheduled for October 1895. This would represent a major "shift of party relationships" that might prevent the "parties of order" from undertaking constitutional reform in the future. (Changes to the constitution required approval from two-thirds of the house.) So Mehnert had come up with the idea of convening an ad hoc special session of the Landtag—to meet sometime before the 1895 elections—to revise the 1868 suffrage.

Mehnert had already shared his idea with an array of parliamentarians before he wrote to Metzsch. These included Baron von Friesen-Rötha, now retired on his estate; the Progressive Landtag deputies Karl Uhlmann and Gustav Philipp; Lothar Streit, the Progressive vice-president of the lower house and mayor of Zwickau; the National Liberal deputy Arthur Georgi and his brother Otto Georgi, mayor of Leipzig; and Otto Beutler, an up-and-coming Conservative and the future mayor of Dresden. In the face of Social Democracy's advance, the mood of these men had become "downright inconsolable." They agreed with Mehnert's prognosis and his plan.

The foundation of Mehnert's *coup* against the existing Landtag was a new suffrage based on the following principles: The tax threshold of three Marks was not to be raised. This was a "concession to the Progressives and the National Liberals." But it was not to be abolished either. Mehnert declared himself agnostic on the issue of mandatory voting. He was undecided whether the tax threshold should be raised for the passive suffrage, that is, for those standing for election. But a class-based suffrage was to be introduced "in order to eliminate the dominance of voters with a modest tax exposure." The Prussian three-class suffrage had "very ably proved itself." Unlike Leipzig's three-class system, however, Mehnert emphasized that elections must be indirect, as in Prussia. The Leipzigers had undoubtedly made a mistake in this regard, claimed Mehnert, because Social Democratic deputies could be elected directly by the third class. Under Mehnert's system, "Social Democrats will hardly be able to enter the Landtag in the future."

Mehnert had no interest in a plural balloting system—one that rewarded certain electors with extra ballots. "[Taking into] consideration various other factors, such as an independent profession, landownership, higher education, etc., to determine specific classes [of electors], would be inexpedient," he wrote.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, neither the Prussian nor the Leipzig system for demarcating the dividing lines between Classes I, II, and III appeared to be correct: "the correct [system] must surely lie in

<sup>85</sup> For the following, Mehnert to Metzsch, 26.12.94, SHStAD, MdI 5414 (all original emphases).

<sup>86</sup> As we will see, expediency led Mehnert to reverse his position and accept a plural suffrage in 1909.



*the middle.*" What Mehnert then proposed did not split the difference between the Leipzig and Prussian systems at all. Instead, he proposed that Class I should contain about 10 percent of electors, Class II about 35 percent and Class III the remaining 50 percent. We might profess amazement that Mehnert proposed including "only" 50 percent of electors in the third class of electors. Recall that at least 80 percent of eligible electors were grouped in the lowest class in the Prussian and Leipzig systems. However, this feature of Mehnert's plan was to be bolstered—and Social Democratic representation was to be constrained—by other stipulations. Of these, the indirect voting procedure was the most important, followed closely by the fact that voting for both delegates and deputies should be public, also as in Prussia. As long as voting was indirect, delegates (*Wahlmänner*) elected by the top two classes would always be able to outvote delegates from the third class in the selection of the actual parliamentary deputy. With the emphasis he placed on proven precedents, Mehnert tried to convince Metzsch that the logic of his argument was unassailable: "Public voting has *completely proved itself* in Prussia: the Prussian suffrage has so far had such a beneficial effect *that Social Democracy does not even participate in elections!* The Prussian House of Deputies does not have *a single Social Democrat* in its midst!"

Mehnert's division of voting classes cannot be considered in isolation. Other elements of his plan were also instrumental to success. Unlike in 1869, when the entire Saxon Landtag was elected on the basis of the 1868 suffrage, Mehnert pointed to another mistake the Leipzigers had made in electing their municipal parliament *en bloc* with the new suffrage of 1894. For the Landtag, it was essential that the new suffrage be introduced incrementally in each of the next one-third elections (scheduled for 1895, 1897, and 1899). Mehnert argued that the sitting Landtag deputies would be more likely to pass suffrage reform if they knew they could retain their seats in the Landtag until 1897 or 1899, instead of facing possible defeat at a wholesale election in 1895. We might imagine that Mehnert, armed with a discriminatory new suffrage, would have been eager to sweep Social Democrats from the Saxon Landtag in an election landslide as soon as possible. Perhaps he already had an inkling of the backlash such a dramatic reversal would engender. In any case, Mehnert promised Metzsch that he would expand on these ideas in due course, hopefully by mid-January 1895. Unwilling to leave the initiative to Metzsch even that long, he provided a list of eleven "test constituencies" which the Saxon civil service could examine to determine the likely result of the three-class voting system he had proposed. This list, he claimed, would allow civil servants in the ministry of the interior to decide what percentage of eligible electors should be included in each voting class. Mehnert listed two last measures he felt must be introduced to ensure that Social Democrats would be driven from the Landtag. The oath of allegiance taken by all Landtag deputies at the beginning of each session should be given "a very *precise* wording" that would make it "absolutely impossible" for Social Democrats to take this pledge. The proposed ad hoc session of the Landtag should also be presented with a new Association Law. This law would make it possible to ban "associations and meetings whose 'tendency' *in any way* contradicts monarchical loyalty."

For Mehnert in December 1894, time was of the essence: immediate action was necessary while memories of anarchist murders the previous summer were still fresh. But Chancellor Hohenlohe had demonstrated in his first two months of office that he was unwilling to follow the extreme course advocated by Botho Eulenburg and other proponents of a coup d'état. The prospects for the Anti-Revolution Bill in the Reichstag were already clouded. Thus, for Mehnert, the "uncertainty of circumstances in the Reich provides a *doubly urgent warning* that we at home must at least keep the reins in our own hands and *take the necessary action while it remains possible to do so*." One could not wait for circumstances to mature. "I would like to ensure that our king—who certainly enjoys true popularity in the *best sense of the word*—is spared a coup d'état in the later years of his reign." A *coup*, Mehnert concluded, "surely *must* be undertaken sooner or later—if the opportunity for a revision of the suffrage *by* constitutional means no longer exists."

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Mehnert's memorandum of December 1894 was not the only prescription for suffrage reform sent to Saxony's minister of the interior. One such proposal had arrived before the Kaiser's Königsberg speech of 6 September 1894 calling for a new crusade. This anonymous white paper (*Denkschrift*), entitled simply "Universal Suffrage," was written by a Conservative member of the Saxon lower house, Hans von Bosse, who began work as a privy counselor in Saxony's interior ministry around January 1894. Bosse's *Denkschrift* argued for a plural suffrage.<sup>87</sup> His suffrage was based loosely on the one recently introduced (but not yet tested) in Belgium. It also drew on proposals for a new municipal suffrage to be introduced in the annexed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Then in the course of 1895 the Saxon interior ministry received more suffrage reform proposals—some short, some very long. The most notable, besides Mehnert's, were from Otto Beutler, Otto Georgi, and Georgi's brother Arthur—a wealthy businessman in the city of Mylau. After Mehnert's speech in December 1895 outlining the direction suffrage reform would take, Saxony's interior ministry also received notes and suggestions from prominent agrarians in Prussia, from the architect of Leipzig's suffrage reform the previous year, and from the Saxon envoy in Berlin. The latter sent along an article by Prussia's former minister of the interior, Ludwig Herrfurth, entitled "Reichstag Suffrage and Mandatory Voting."

Two documents found in the files of the Saxon ministry of the interior are especially illuminating. They allow us to judge which suffrage reform proposals found agreement from government leader Metzsch and his chief advisor in suffrage matters, Privy Counselor Bruno Oswin Merz. The first of these documents contains speaking notes Metzsch used when he convened a conference of Saxon regional governors on 30 October 1894. The second is a memorandum prepared

<sup>87</sup> Bosse's "Allgemeines Wahlrecht" in StadtAL, Kap. 2, Nr. 90. Bosse had previously served as AHM in Dippoldiswalde and Meißen, and from 1895–8 he was KHM in Bautzen. See also [Arthur] Georgi, "Bemerkungen zu der Denkschrift 'Allgemeines Wahlrecht,'" 4.9.94, and [Arthur] Georgi to Metzsch, 16.9.95, with his own memorandum, "Zu der Frage einer Änderung des sächs. Landtagswahlrechts," in SHStAd, Mdl 5414, which holds other proposals.

by Merz, dated 17 October 1895. These documents provide bookends to a year-long debate that *preceded* the public offensive launched by the Kartell parties in December 1894. They reveal that the authoritarian state had no interest in taking the initiative to revise the Saxon Landtag suffrage. Instead it was leaders of the three “parties of order” who pressed the government to act and imposed their own solution to Saxony’s suffrage dilemma.

#### AT THE GREEN DESK

When Metzsch met with his regional governors on 30 October 1894,<sup>88</sup> he began by telling them that the “parties of order” were convinced that the “low *Census*<sup>89</sup> of 3 M[arks] no longer represented a sufficient bulwark against the decisive weight in elections falling into the hands of the masses.”<sup>90</sup> Between the three partial elections of 1877–81 and those of 1889–93, the number of votes cast for Social Democratic candidates had risen over 525 percent, from 14,859 to 92,384. “These numbers speak clearly enough for the necessity of a reform of the electoral law . . . It does not seem advisable to postpone a reform any longer.” Metzsch believed three options lay open for a reform: “either one restricts the suffrage more than it is at present, or one abolishes the equal suffrage,” or one does both things at the same time.

Considering first the abolition of the principle of equality, Metzsch mentioned a plural suffrage system. “The idea of weighing votes rather than counting them has something convincing about it,” claimed Metzsch, “and it is only fair and just when those citizens of the state who stand in close and firm relation to the state and have a heightened interest in the continuing welfare of the state . . . are provided greater rights.” To evaluate what effect on Landtag elections the provision of more than one ballot to certain citizens would have, a series of test cases had been selected. The government’s assumption here was that each elector would have at least one ballot; that house-owners and those conducting an independent business enterprise would receive two ballots; and that electors who paid more than thirty Marks in direct taxes annually would receive three ballots.<sup>91</sup> However, Metzsch declared that these calculations offered little evidence that Social Democracy would be disadvantaged enough to satisfy most advocates of suffrage reform. By contrast, a *Klassenwahl*system for Saxony promised “to bring our suffrage into line with that of Germany’s largest federal state.” Metzsch felt that having both Prussia and Saxony elect their Landtag with a three-class suffrage would be beneficial; but it would have the disadvantage of

<sup>88</sup> “*Am grünen Tisch*” is a term referring to the green leather that once covered the desks of German civil servants. A decision taken “at the green desk” may reflect bureaucratic theory, not reality or good practice.

<sup>89</sup> That is, the tax threshold for enfranchisement for Saxon Landtag elections.

<sup>90</sup> Handwritten speaking notes for a meeting with Saxon regional governors, 30.10.94, SHStAD, Mdl 5414.

<sup>91</sup> Bebel claimed that this corresponded to an annual income of 2,200–2,500 Marks: of 118,942 people who paid 30 Marks annually, some would be ineligible because they were women or lacked Saxon citizenship. BARuS, 3:657.

representing a “complete break” with Saxony’s present system. Therefore he could not endorse the three-class system either.

What of the second option, “a restriction of the suffrage”? Metzsch began with a frontal attack on one of democracy’s most fundamental premises. “Universal suffrage, which our Landtag suffrage is unfortunately approaching, is the outdated product of a turbulent era.” None of his listeners could doubt the depth of Metzsch’s anti-democratic sentiment by the time he declared that “the mere existence of a human being gives him no claim to take part in governance, but only to be governed reasonably.” Among possible restrictions to the suffrage Metzsch listed raising the age of enfranchisement to thirty; a longer residency requirement; adding other grounds for exclusion; and raising the tax threshold for enfranchisement. The latter he regarded as the most simple remedy and the one most likely to accomplish the reformers’ aims. In 1868, the government’s preferred threshold of two Thaler (six Marks) had been cut in half by deputies in the lower house of the Landtag. If one now wanted to follow the same yardstick, Metzsch argued, it would be necessary to take into account inflation over the intervening three decades. Therefore only a tax threshold of ten Marks would be acceptable. Saxon civil servants had calculated the effects of this reform too, based on several localities. The results of this exercise were more promising than those from a plural suffrage.

Although introduction of a two-year residency requirement would be beneficial, Metzsch was inclined to consider such novelties as indirect voting, public voting (replacing the secret ballot), and mandatory voting. But each of these options raised potential problems. For example, imposing a fine on non-voters might drive some supporters of the “parties of order” to register a protest vote for the oppositional parties next time around. Depriving them of their right to vote in future elections would be patently absurd. Metzsch also assumed that by introducing indirect elections or public voting it would be necessary to elect a new Landtag in a general election, not through partial elections every two years. Contesting every seat in the Landtag at the same time was no more attractive in 1894 than it had been in 1868: it would contribute to the politicization and mobilization of “the masses,” with unforeseeable consequences.

Many of the regional governors who listened to Metzsch’s peroration in October 1894 either belonged to or sympathized with the Saxon Conservative Party. Therefore Paul Mehnert could not have remained ignorant of the government’s preferred road forward. This only underscores the significance of Mehnert’s willingness in December—less than eight weeks later—to propose a suffrage reform that diverged so fundamentally from the proposals outlined by Metzsch. Mehnert threw aside the government’s worries about appearing “too reactionary.” And he wanted to proceed without delay. The fact that the Saxon interior ministry continued to gather suffrage reform proposals for a year after Metzsch’s meeting with his regional governors added to the Conservatives’ frustration.

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When Privy Counselor Bruno Merz drew up his long memorandum for Metzsch in October 1895, he appended the proposals he had received from third parties and

linked their arguments to his own conclusions.<sup>92</sup> The government could proceed along one of two paths, Merz argued. It could (A) make minor revisions to the existing Landtag suffrage. Or it could (B) endorse a full-scale change of system which would represent a “complete” or “partial” abandonment of the suffrage law of 1868. Merz argued for the first option. Yet, most of his memo was dedicated to explaining the disadvantages and dangers inherent in both of them. Thus his conclusion opened a door for the “parties of order” to grasp the initiative in December 1895: the government, wrote Merz, should wait for the majority parties in the lower house of the Landtag to identify which reform was both practicable and likely to yield the desired outcome.

Just as revealing as Merz’s conclusion was the reasoning he applied to the many possible reforms still under consideration. Category A listed eight “minor” revisions to the existing suffrage. Category B listed five more comprehensive reforms.

In contrast to Metzsch’s statement to his regional governors a year earlier, Merz no longer recommended raising the tax threshold from three to ten Marks. This was the first “minor” revision he addressed (A1), though of course it was not minor at all: raising the threshold to ten Marks would reduce the number of eligible electors by more than one-half. Merz objected to such a radical change mainly because it would disenfranchise many electors “who have not yet fallen under the spell of revolution.” Merz then addressed proposals (A2) that advocated “general mandatory voting” as the natural “correlate” of the “general suffrage.” He recapitulated the familiar logic that mandatory voting would counter-balance the ability of the “parties of revolution”—note the plural—to achieve a maximum turnout through their “sharp party discipline” and “unceasing energy.” By contrast, low turnout among supporters of the “parties of order” was actually getting worse. But then Merz cited the usual objections to mandatory voting—that it would drive non-voters into the hands of Social Democracy if they were fined or imprisoned. He concluded that mandatory voting could “hardly be considered seriously.”

Merz had received a group of proposals that offered remedies (A3) to another “problem,” namely, that Social Democrats urged their supporters to apply for Saxon citizenship “shortly before Landtag elections” only in order to become eligible electors. These remedies proposed that Saxon citizenship of two years or more be required for enfranchisement. Merz concluded that Landtag voting would not be affected in any significant way by such a restriction. The number of votes Social Democrats had won with their citizenship campaign was negligible. The opposite effect seemed more likely to him: it would increase the “political propriety” of the voting public and therefore might slow the Social Democratic tide. The same was true (A4) if a minimum six-month residency in one’s own voting district was required. But Merz had no sympathy (A5) for those who argued for a return to

<sup>92</sup> “Die Aenderung des Saechsischen Wahlrechtes betreffend. Vorschlag: Merz,” 17.10.95, SHStAD, Mdl 5414. The same file holds earlier correspondence and proposals (1894–95) from the Prussian statistician Georg Evert (Berlin), KHM von Ehrenstein (Leipzig), Arthur Georgi (Leipzig), Stadtrat Leo Ludwig-Wolf (Leipzig), and others.

the residency requirement which, before 1868, had been demanded of those seeking election.

By October 1895 Conservatives and some National Liberals were beginning to believe that they would profit if public voting were introduced in Saxony (A6). Merz disagreed. It was the socialists who would profit from the "electoral terrorism" public voting would introduce. Such a reform would also increase the number of non-voters and the likelihood of "unfavorable" election outcomes. He had no more sympathy for proposals (A7) in *Das Vaterland* and other conservative newspapers for raising the minimum voting age to twenty-seven or thirty. From the census of 1890 Merz had estimated the number of enfranchised electors in the range of ages between twenty-five and thirty. He concluded that although many young supporters of Social Democracy would be disenfranchised, so would many "right-thinking voters." Hence "the measure would at least be viewed as a double-edged sword." This proposal would be very unpopular in liberal circles and would not enhance Saxony's pioneering reputation among other federal states.

As for the last "minor" reform, Merz addressed the question of a plural suffrage (A8). He cited two proposals along these lines. The first was Karl Gageur's study, *Suffrage Reform in the Reich and in Baden* (1893).<sup>93</sup> The second was a proposal published in the *Leipziger Zeitung* earlier in 1895. Gageur had proposed that every ballot cast by a voter over the age of fifty should be counted twice. The other proposal would have awarded a second ballot to electors between forty and fifty and a third ballot to those over fifty. Merz's discussion of plural voting has special resonance. An extra ballot for electors over fifty was one component of the plural suffrage eventually passed in 1909. What did Merz think in 1895? He acknowledged the argument that every elector, even though he might never achieve wealth or higher education, could hope one day to turn forty or fifty and gain a second ballot. Hence this criterion for enfranchisement was more "natural" than others. Did the "age vote" offer "any certainty of achieving the desired result?" It might be true, wrote Merz, that Social Democrats drew most of their supporters from young adults and the "parties order" drew theirs from older ones. "But will that always remain so when today's dedicated youth will have reached a more mature or older age?" Besides, older voters would always be more susceptible to "the terrorism of youth." Therefore, if the "hydra [of revolution] does not have its head cut off by other means," providing extra ballots to older electors would increase the Social Democratic vote, "perhaps right away and at least in the future."

Up to this point Merz had provided compelling arguments against six of the eight variations he categorized as "minor" revisions to the existing suffrage. The remaining two he considered *too* minor to merit study: neither would achieve the anti-revolutionary goals Metzsch and others had set.

Of the five major proposals that would produce a substantially new electoral system, Merz began (B1) with the plural ballot system on the Belgian model, which was based not only on age but also on other criteria. No one, he felt, had

<sup>93</sup> Gageur, *Reform*, esp. 294.

provided convincing evidence that plural voting would stop Social Democrats from entering Saxony's lower house in increasing numbers. Experience had already shown that many small property owners and "many suffering small artisans" were "more and more going over to the Social Democratic camp." Nor did a tax threshold of 30 Marks offer any guarantee that those who would thereby receive three ballots possessed the "high-mindedness of outlook" necessary to beat back the enemy. This was Merz's most remarkable, and pessimistic, conclusion.

Merz next addressed a suffrage reform proposal (B2) that was rarely discussed in the 1890s—proportional representation. This system would counteract "the drawbacks that majority elections demonstrate in Germany." Among countries that had such a system, Merz listed Italy, Spain, and France; it has also been introduced in Hamburg, though "not completely without controversy." His detailed explanation of proportional representation demonstrated that Merz appreciated its advantages, including the possibility of doing away with run-off ballots. But he concluded that Social Democracy's presence in all parts of Saxony, combined with its concentrated strength in particular districts, "would mean the eventual victory of Social Democracy all down the line" if such a system were introduced.

Merz devoted almost ten pages of his memorandum to a proposal (B3) that would produce a "composite parliament."<sup>94</sup> Some deputies would be elected directly by the people whereas other deputies ("or delegates") would be chosen by "local and occupational bodies and organizations." Citing the *Leipziger Zeitung*, Merz noted that these composite parliaments would provide a "corrective" to universal suffrage in the form of an "estate-bound adjunct." "All these proposals have something remarkably promising about them at first sight," observed Merz, and they seemed to enjoy the approval of Albert Schäffle, a respected constitutional scholar. Unfortunately, they raised "a whole host of difficulties." Such a system for electing the lower house would immediately prompt questions about the composition and function of Saxony's upper house, which already represented many of these corporate bodies (for example the churches and the universities). Determining the number of corporate groups to be represented in parliament and the number of deputies each would be allocated would "open a wide field of conflicts" among competing interests. The "organized guilds" would demand their own representation; elementary school teachers and those in private schools, Gymnasias, and institutions of higher learning would hardly see eye to eye; and other groups (for example, doctors) would inevitably feel under-represented.

How would such a system be appraised in the Landtag, Merz asked, "when so many interests intersect with each other!?" Merz could already imagine the thankless task he would face in devising such a system. He provided examples. Landtag constituencies in Saxony varied in population from 16,000 to 77,000, containing between 5,000 and 22,000 eligible electors. "The geometry of constituencies is a wasps' nest which one should not disturb except in an emergency!" Another shibboleth of the present system should not be changed without careful

<sup>94</sup> Anon., *Das Wahlrecht zum Reichstage* (Leipzig, 1895), esp. pp. 9ff., 17ff., 22ff., 27ff.

consideration. Bringing municipal interests so directly into a reformed Landtag would inevitably accelerate the politicization of local administration. In short, no matter how attractive this system might appear "in theory," practical problems of implementation arose "in whichever direction one looks." More important still, the goal of any reform—to hold back the tide of Social Democracy—would not be met.

Merz examined (B4) a three-class suffrage based on direct elections. Quite apart from the plutocratic nature of the suffrage, Merz believed the three-class suffrage in this form had so many "difficulties" and "dangers" that it could not be passed by the present Landtag. Therefore Merz's last reflections (B5) considered a three-class suffrage with *indirect* elections—the same two-stage process that had prevailed in Prussia since 1850. Merz conceded that any three-class suffrage "conflicts with the principle of equity." But not all three-class suffrages were alike.<sup>95</sup> Success would "naturally depend on the division of the various classes." The logic was obvious: "If one puts the borderline very high, then the exclusion of Social Democracy is fairly certain, but this gives the system a too plutocratic character; if one sets it too low, then one arms Social Democracy with the possibility of entering the *Landhaus* in larger numbers!"

At this point Merz began second-guessing himself, even though his long memorandum was nearing its end. He concluded that Saxony's present government would be "untrue" to the principle of direct elections, which it had endorsed in 1868, if it now chose to replace it with indirect elections. (Here Metzsch signalled his agreement in the margin.) But what alternative was left? Merz's memorandum had shown that none of the suffrage reform proposals floated so far was free of significant deficiencies. Therefore, "the government can hardly any longer seize the initiative in this matter" (here again Metzsch agreed). Because the parties in the Landtag were more directly affected by the outcome of suffrage reform than was the government itself, Merz counseled Metzsch to seek clarification from the major party leaders. The government should inform those leaders *not only* that it expected them to take the initiative *but also* that they should provide a blueprint of the suffrage reform that would resolve the issue.

On this note Merz ended his consideration of thirteen different electoral systems. Did Metzsch, his superior, feel let down by this inconclusive advice? Not at all. Nothing in Metzsch's actions over the next four months deviated from Merz's last recommendation. At each point before March 1896 when Saxon suffrage reform might have taken a different path, Metzsch—and his king—allowed the "parties of order" to show the way.<sup>96</sup> Those parties had no sympathy for the hesitant policy advocated by their own government leader and his suffrage expert. They paid allegiance to Paul Mehnert.

<sup>95</sup> A division of classes as in Leipzig was "too plutocratic." Therefore Class I should have "the first 15 or 10% of voters." Class II should have "the next 35 or 25%, Class III the remaining 50 or 65%."

<sup>96</sup> Mehnert to Metzsch, 25.11.95: marginalia confirm King Albert's agreement. SHStAD, Mdl 5414.



## "MEHNERT'S LAW"

When Paul Mehnert introduced his planned reform on the floor of the Landtag on 10 December 1895, he did not forget to accentuate the positive. The minimum voting age of twenty-five was retained from the 1868 suffrage: who could claim that reactionaries had taken liberties? Instead the tax threshold of three Marks, which initially had put the vote beyond the reach of workers, had been thrown overboard. So the majority parties were actually broadening the suffrage. Later calculations estimated that about 150,000 Saxons would be newly enfranchised.<sup>97</sup> Mehnert emphasized that no Saxon would be deprived of a constitutional privilege he had previously enjoyed. This was technically true. It allowed the two antisemites in the house to move from opposition to support of the bill while still seeming to side with "the people."<sup>98</sup> To the charge that their reform was regressive, Mehnert and other defenders of the planned reform declared they did not want Saxony to become another Hamburg, which was represented in the Reichstag by only socialist deputies. Conservatives and National Liberals, Progressives and antisemites—all claimed they wanted to protect Saxons from the "dictatorship of the proletariat." By now we might find such pronouncements unremarkable. But the Austrian envoy believed that Saxony's decision to swim against the tide of democratization should be duly noted in other German states, and beyond. "The phenomenon that an electoral system, having existed since the introduction of parliamentarism, i.e. for 65 years, is being modified not along the lines of initiating the *suffrage universel* but in terms of restricting the suffrage, may claim a certain degree of universal attention simply because of the peculiarity attached to it."<sup>99</sup>

When a speakers' dual erupted in the Landtag on 10 December, pitting Mehnert against the Social Democrat Hermann Goldstein, Saxony's pioneering role became even more apparent. "Gentlemen!", declared Mehnert, "Social Democracy has always regarded the electoral question as a question of power: it should be the last to be amazed when those who fortunately *still* hold power give expression to their own views with the necessary emphasis . . . Gentlemen! *We positively want the eyes of all Germany to be cast on our chamber, on our Saxon land. We want people elsewhere, too, to find the courage to oppose the aspirations of Social Democracy with the same energy and the same diligence that those aspirations have provoked.*"<sup>100</sup> Goldstein also stressed the national dimensions of the battle beginning that day. "Saxony is—if one may use the expression—the *political crucible* in which all *political reverses* are first tested; and one can say that usually the first incitement comes from here . . . insofar as reactionary measures in the Reich are concerned . . . If one wants to know what is going to happen in the Reich, then one looks first to Saxony. That brings us no glory but . . . the exact opposite."

<sup>97</sup> Not quite. The number of eligible LT electors rose from about 536,000 in 1895 to 659,863 under the 1896 suffrage. ZSSL 54, no. 2 (1908): 170.

<sup>98</sup> *Vaterl.* 6.3.96.

<sup>99</sup> The recently-appointed Austrian envoy to Saxony, Count Heinrich von Lützow zu Drey-Lützow und Seedorf, 1.2.96, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>100</sup> *LTMit* 1895/96, II.K., 1:175f. for this and the following (10.12.95) (original emphases).

The liberals had little to add to Mehnert's motion for one very good reason: everything had been worked out beforehand by conservative and liberal members of Mehnert's Senior Assembly.<sup>101</sup> At first, the Kartell parties had been unable to agree on what sort of restricted suffrage could be implemented. They called on Metzsch to mediate. This meeting had taken place on 4 December 1895.<sup>102</sup> At that point the Kartell parties were still unsure about what stipulations they wanted to include in a new suffrage bill—for example, whether to raise the tax threshold or do away with it altogether. They did agree that the government should introduce the necessary legislation by rebutting the SPD's motion with an official declaration, namely, that a government bill could be expected in the course of the current Landtag session. But Metzsch followed Merz's advice to the letter. He refused this request. He insisted that the parties had to take on the "odium" of negative public opinion in first suggesting a revision to the existing suffrage. Immediately after the meeting, Metzsch declared privately that the National Liberals and Progressives were not courageous enough to take the initiative: they feared reprisals from their voters. The Conservatives had fewer worries. But they did not want to proceed alone either. Therefore members of the Senior Assembly decided that the Conservatives would introduce a joint motion on behalf of the Kartell, asking the government to draw up legislation. It was clear that the government would endorse virtually any suffrage revision that had the prior approval of such a commanding majority. But after his meeting with the Kartell leaders on 4 December Metzsch claimed that he was still completely in the dark as to what sort of suffrage reform would find agreement among the parties.<sup>103</sup>

By day's end on 10 December, suffrage reform had passed its first hurdle. Metzsch was now satisfied that the reform proposed by Mehnert's Senior Assembly would "reduce the representation of the Social Democratic Party in the Landtag to insignificance." Any worries about whether Saxony should take a step with such obvious ramifications for Reich politics seemed to have evaporated overnight, "on account of the unity of purpose among the Saxon parties but also with respect to the sharper actions against the socialist party efforts presently underway in Prussia and the Reich." Metzsch believed his chosen course had received Berlin's stamp of approval that very day. On 10 December Chancellor Hohenlohe responded in the Reichstag to Free Conservative charges of disunity and lack of direction in Reich affairs. How much longer, Hohenlohe asked the house, could the government and "peace-loving burghers" tolerate a movement that opposed the Fatherland? Without explicitly referring to Prussia's crackdown on Social Democrats, Hohenlohe declared that "If we have held the reins a little more tightly since this summer, then we have acted according to the sensibilities of all right-thinking people in the German Empire. (*Bravo! on the right.*)"<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Mehnert to Metzsch, 25.11.95.

<sup>102</sup> Dönhoff, 4/5.12.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Chotek, 9.12.95, HHStAV, PAV/49. Ibid. 11.12.95 for the following.

<sup>104</sup> *SBDR*, 10.12.1895, p. 40.

The next steps toward Landtag suffrage reform in Saxony were taken in quick order. On 19 December Privy Counselor Merz traveled to Berlin to consult with his Prussian counterpart, Max von Philipsborn, who had been instructed to help Merz with the “extremely urgent” technical details of a new suffrage law for Saxony. An intensive correspondence followed this visit, during which a draft government bill was drawn up and fine-tuned.<sup>105</sup> The Saxon government introduced its bill to the lower house of the Landtag on 5 February 1896. That bill was sent to committee after only two days of debate.<sup>106</sup> At the first important meeting of that committee, on 17 February, Metzsch and Merz were invited to attend. They were able to dissuade committee members from revising some features of the government’s draft bill; but they had to accept other changes they disliked. The revised bill was debated in plenum for another two days on 5–6 March. It was approved by the Landtag’s upper chamber on 18 March—a not insignificant date in German history—and it became law on 28 March 1896.<sup>107</sup>

On the road to this achievement, the parties of order displayed considerable discipline in side-stepping divisive issues.<sup>108</sup> The National Liberals initially expressed their desire to redraw the balance between urban and rural constituencies. They advocated a system whereby the entire Landtag would be elected at one time. And they wanted to widen the debate to include the possibility of a major reform of the upper house. (Each of these demands would reappear after 1900.) However, on 10 December 1895, the National Liberal Albert Niethammer had admitted that his party would not insist on any of these points if doing so endangered the government’s bill.

Reactions to the final suffrage reform bill was far from universally positive, even among Saxony’s bourgeois public.<sup>109</sup> Hundreds of protests and petitions landed in the files of the Saxon parliament and the interior ministry. In mid-December 1895 the Prussian envoy Dönhoff reported that it was entirely typical of Saxon burghers that they called for government protection against the socialists but immediately became worried as soon as concrete measures were proposed. Uncomfortable with the obvious contrast between *Freiheit* and *Reaktion*, moderate liberals sniped at the government.<sup>110</sup> The left-liberal *Dresdner Zeitung* argued that the SPD should be combated only with “spiritual weapons.”<sup>111</sup> The left-liberal press also cited Bismarck’s criticism of the Prussian three-class suffrage (dating from the 1860s).

<sup>105</sup> Correspondence (21.12.95–24.3.96), SHStAD, MdI 5414. Cf. *SParl*, 49.

<sup>106</sup> Committee minutes (14.2.96–28.2.96), plenary debates, etc., SHStAD, Ständerversammlung 10277.

<sup>107</sup> *LT Mitt* 1895/6, II.K, 1:799–863 (5.3.96), 1:865–92 (6.3.96); *LT Akten* 1895/6, II.K., Berichte Nrn. 113, 119 (both 28.2.96). Cf. *LT Mitt* 1895/6, I.K. 1:397–406 (18.3.96); *LT Akten* 1895/6, I.K., Bericht Nr. 92; Ständische Schrift Nr. 12 (19.3.96); Schimmel, *Entwicklung*; Pache, *Geschichte*, 7–15; Oppe, *Reform*.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Dönhoff’s draft reports, 21.11.95; 4/5/12/15.12.95; 9/18.1.96, 6/10/13.2.96, 3/6/8.3.96, GStAB, HA I, Rep. 81, VI, A, Nr. 1, Vol. II.

<sup>109</sup> Petitions and other protests in SHStAD, MdI 5409; SHStAD, Ständerversammlung 10278–86. Cf. Beyer, “Kampf,” 123ff., and Müller, “Presse.”

<sup>110</sup> Dönhoff, 15.12.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>111</sup> *LVZ*, 3.1.96, Beilage; Beyer, “Kampf,” 212.

When this tactic began to stir anti-reform sentiments among Saxon burghers, a conservative publisher sent a telegram to the former chancellor. He received a prompt reply bestowing Bismarck's blessing on the reform.

Through January and February 1896, more than a handful of liberal university professors and industrialists continued to worry that the proposed suffrage reform was too plutocratic or too reactionary (or both). "We want social peace," declared a "new liberal" in the Saxon National Liberal Party. Nevertheless, Conservatives and a majority of the Saxon liberals found common ground on one salient point: under a three-class suffrage, "Social Democracy will cease to pollute the chamber." For most Saxon burghers, therefore, protests fell on deaf ears. "If the average elector hesitates before the reactionary character of the proposed legislation, he sees in the presence of 15 Social Democrats in the Landtag a political nuisance, which may grow into a danger, and ought to be dealt with."<sup>112</sup> The independent antisemites also opposed the proposed reform.<sup>113</sup> Labeling it an "assassination" of the Saxon suffrage—a term also used by the socialists—Oswald Zimmermann's *Deutsche Wacht* called on Saxons to oppose Mehnert's plan. Protest meetings were held in Chemnitz, Stolpen, Dresden, Nossen, and other towns with strong antisemitic clubs.<sup>114</sup> Yet both antisemitic deputies quietly absented themselves from the house when the first vote on Mehnert's motion passed. They opposed the final bill in March 1896, perhaps to their regret: both exited the Landtag in 1897.

The Social Democrats were initially in disarray.<sup>115</sup> They had not expected Mehnert and his colleagues to move so suddenly to the offensive. And it was not easy to organize protest rallies just when the Christmas season was beginning. Soon, however, their party press was calling for "a violent counter-movement." In late December 1895 the socialists organized public rallies (some attracting over 5,000 listeners) and they distributed thousands of leaflets. Two large rallies in Dresden on 15 January 1896 increased the scale of the protests, with about 9,000 in attendance. Wilhelm Liebknecht warned his audience that suffrage reform in Saxony was a prelude to a frontal attack on the Reichstag's universal suffrage.<sup>116</sup> August Bebel fired the crowd's imagination when he portrayed his party's experiences under the Prussian three-class suffrage in the darkest terms. He reported that the "highest circles" in Germany agreed that "100,000 heads will have to roll."<sup>117</sup> After Bebel spoke, this meeting was dissolved by the police. The same fate befell the Suffrage League that was formed in the first week of January; it was suppressed by police order on 20 January 1896.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Strachey, 28.2.96, PRO, FO 68/181.

<sup>113</sup> Niethammer (draft), 11.12.95, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 953.

<sup>114</sup> *DW*, 6/9.10.95.

<sup>115</sup> *Vw*, 21/23/24.12.95; Dönhoff, 9/18.1.96; 6/10/13/15.2.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4; Beyer, "Kampf."

<sup>116</sup> *LVN*, 13.12.95.

<sup>117</sup> Dönhoff, 18.1.96, cited previously.

<sup>118</sup> *LVZ*, 9.1.96, 20/22.1.96; *Vw*, 7/21/30.1.96, and other reports in BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12854. Some 1.4 million leaflets were allegedly distributed during the SPD's anti-suffrage reform campaign. A total of 422 Social Democrats took part in this agitation; they organized 160 protest rallies, and they collected 160,000 signatures on their petitions. *Vaterl*, 10.4.96, citing the SPD's Saxon congress held in April 1896.

The Conservative press of course enthused about the reform while it was debated in committee.<sup>119</sup> One contributor to *Das Vaterland* hoped that the rest of Germany would appreciate “that a little parliament had the courage to take up the decisive battle against Social Democracy.” A new age was dawning, and no one could doubt that the showdown “between order and revolution” had begun—in Saxony.<sup>120</sup> A contributor to the Conservatives’ *Dresdner Nachrichten* advised against compromise and “half-measures.” Such statements cannot be taken at face value. After all, even right-wing voters in Saxony could reasonably say that the suffrage of 1868 had served them well in preserving Conservative ascendance in the Landtag. Moreover, the Landtag elections of 1895 had turned out better than those of 1893, in part because the “parties of order” had been able to agree on a common candidate at the last minute in many endangered constituencies (Wilhelm II: “The Saxons are much more insightful than the Prussians”).<sup>121</sup> Therefore Saxons might well ask: Why a suffrage revision now? Exactly that question had been put by Metzsch to the members of the Senior Assembly on 4 December 1895. Success in the 1895 elections, he was told, had been “accidental.” Portents of future defeats were more significant. King Albert offered much the same rationale—with a twist. Noting that the SPD might eventually have to be admitted to Landtag committees, the king believed something had to be done before the “united Social Democrats and antisemites” won a majority in the house. He nevertheless hoped that “a few” Social Democrats would be elected even under the new suffrage.

The government’s bill, debated on 12–13 February 1896, accommodated all the wishes expressed by the house majority on 10 December. Thereafter divisions became more pronounced within both the left-liberal and National Liberal camps.<sup>122</sup> The well-respected social reformer, statistician, and professor in Leipzig, Dr. Victor Böhmert, published a pamphlet on 19 February chronicling protests from National Liberals.<sup>123</sup> Böhmert undressed the reactionary framers of the new suffrage and left them exposed to other attacks from the left. One of his assertions certainly hit the mark. The government’s preamble to its bill had explained the procedure for dividing eligible electors into three classes according to their payment of direct state taxes. But it had given no indication of what proportion of electors would actually be grouped into Classes I, II, and III. This had caused “uncertainty” among the population—and “profound rage.”<sup>124</sup> A more serious threat was posed by the national publicist Hans Delbrück when he commented on the Saxon suffrage issue in his *Preußische Jahrbücher*.<sup>125</sup> Uncompromising in his criticism of the Saxon Conservatives, Delbrück called on the liberal man of principle to do what

<sup>119</sup> For the following, Dönhoff to Prussian FO, 10/21/27.2.96; 3/6/8/18/20/28.3.96; 24.4.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4.

<sup>120</sup> *Vaterl.*, 13.12.95; cf. Dönhoff to Prussian FO, 15.12.95, cited previously.

<sup>121</sup> Dönhoff, 18.10.95, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Niethammer (draft), 6.2.96, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 954; Niethammer, 20.1.96, BHStAM II, MA 2864; Dönhoff, 10/13.2.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4.

<sup>123</sup> Böhmert, *Wahlgesetzentwurf*, 1, 3–5.

<sup>124</sup> *LVZ*, 15.1.96, 2. Beilage, cited in Beyer, “Kampf,” 117; Dönhoff, 6.2.96, cited previously.

<sup>125</sup> *PrJbb* 83 (1896): 592f.

the liberal politician in Saxony could not: break with the Conservatives and follow his own conscience as a "politically enlightened and educated man." If this did not happen Delbrück predicted the worst, not only for Saxony but for the "parties of order" everywhere. "The Social Democrats will be driven out of the [Saxon] chamber . . . —we in the Reich will have to face the music." This prognosis was plausible: the Social Democrats continued to denounce the prospect of a "coup d'état," the "rape" of electoral freedom, and the "disenfranchisement of the masses."<sup>126</sup>

After encountering rough sailing with a bill that was expected to experience smooth passage, Metzsch avoided political shipwreck again on 3 March 1896, when two of the eight committee members insisted on issuing a minority report. The Progressive member believed that a substantial suffrage reform was neither necessary nor wise, but he was isolated even within his own caucus. The National Liberal member called for a plural suffrage. In this he received support from the Reich Association in Dresden and many National Liberals in Leipzig. However, a general assembly of the National Liberals' statewide organization held on 9 February 1896 disavowed the dissenters. The party's elder statesman Karl Biedermann threatened to resign from the party if it pressed its objections to the bill. Biedermann got his way.

By March 1896 the Social Democrats' protests and the liberals' doubts had become moot. Only two days of debate (12–13 March) were needed to prove the point. The overfilled galleries of the Landtag were expecting fireworks, but the listeners were disappointed. The same pat phrases were used by all non-socialist speakers. Even the SPD deputies failed to rise to the occasion: their speeches were marked by a spirit of resignation. The only flutter of controversy arose when one speaker angered Saxon particularists by claiming that the suffrage bill reduced their kingdom to a province of Prussia. When the crucial vote was taken on 6 March, the margin of victory was one-sided: fifty-six in favor, twenty-two opposed, with a handful of deputies absent from the house.<sup>127</sup> Subsequent debate in the upper chamber was a tiresome denouement. Metzsch's stewardship was required one last time when some nobles advocated raising the age of enfranchisement and instituting a tax threshold of ten Marks.<sup>128</sup> But members of the upper house were eager not to rock a boat that was nearing safe harbor. They passed the bill unanimously and on 28 March it became law. By then Saxony's Landtag suffrage was known simply as "Mehnert's Law."

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Disagreement arose immediately within the Saxon SPD's ranks. Should the party's Landtag deputies resign their seats in protest? Socialists in Leipzig favored such a demonstrative move. But more moderate Social Democrats who dominated the

<sup>126</sup> Lützow, 1.2.96, HHStAV, PAV/49; *NZ* 14, H. 23 (26.2.96): 1:705–8.

<sup>127</sup> The nays included 15 Social Democrats, 4 National Liberals (mainly industrialists), 1 Conservative, and 2 antisemites.

<sup>128</sup> *LMitt* 1895/6, I.K., 1:398–406 (18.3.96); Dönhoff, 18/20.3.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4.

Dresden and Chemnitz associations insisted that only a general congress could decide the question. In the first week of April 1896, Saxon socialists decided against boycotting future Landtag elections.<sup>129</sup> A few months later so did August Bebel. "Vote *more!*" he declared, "More often the better!"<sup>130</sup> But the Leipzigers refused to give in, contributing to their later reputation for radicalism. They stuck with their boycott and demanded that their two Landtag deputies resign their seats. The revisionist Eduard Bernstein agreed with Bebel that the Leipzigers' boycott was unwise. But he also complained that Social Democrats elsewhere in Saxony displayed no real passion in denouncing the "scandalous" new law. With one eye to the English bourgeoisie's successful mobilization of public opinion in 1832, which led to the First Reform Act, Bernstein wrote in *Die Neue Zeit* that the party should "not be too sparing" in mentioning the threat of revolution.<sup>131</sup> Bernstein's call to arms did not elicit an echo. As another revisionist critic put it later, the Saxon people remained "quiet as a mouse" after their disenfranchisement.<sup>132</sup>

As the father of Saxony's three-class suffrage,<sup>133</sup> Mehnert could soon boast that his initiative had received the blessing of other German observers. This is exactly what Arthur Georgi had predicted in September 1894 when he wrote that "a certain correspondence among the electoral systems in the individual German states may finally pave the way [for us] also to escape the dangers of the general, equal, and direct suffrage in the Reich."<sup>134</sup> In April 1896 "the Bavarian government was gazing toward Dresden, full of envy." Bavaria's government leader Friedrich Krafft von Crailsheim had doubted that the suffrage reform would be approved; but its passage was a "great victory" which he characterized as "an advance backwards."<sup>135</sup> Regressive suffrage reforms were also enacted around this time in the small federal states of Anhalt, Hamburg, and Braunschweig. For his part, King Albert felt the bill "did credit to the sound sense of the [Saxon] population." It would provide "a very useful barrier against Social Democracy" whose "semi-educated mediocrities sitting here in the *Landhaus*" were intent on "seizing the upper hand."<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, the king and his first minister had also experienced "bitter disappointment that the opposition [to the bill] by no means originated only with the small but noisy Social Democratic caucus."<sup>137</sup> "Learned but grizzled" professors at the University of Leipzig, who were "anything but revolutionaries," had been "doctrinaire" and "tactless." Government leader Metzsch was discouraged by these "turnip scholars"—he felt they were completely out of touch with the public mood in Saxony.

<sup>129</sup> LVZ, 7/8.4.96; cf. LWRK, 81–7; Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 54f.

<sup>130</sup> Cited in Carsten, *Bebel*, 169 (emphasis added).

<sup>131</sup> NZ 14, Bd. 2, no. 32 (29.4.1896): 181–8; Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 55.

<sup>132</sup> Edmund Fischer (1904), cited in Warren, *Red Kingdom*, 23.

<sup>133</sup> Dönhoff, 24.4.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Georgi, 16.9.94, SHStAD, Mdl 5414, cited previously. Cf. *SParl*, 50.

<sup>135</sup> "ein Fortschritt nach rückwärts." Report of the Saxon envoy to Bavaria, 10.4.96, in Beyer, "Kampf," 212.

<sup>136</sup> Lützow, 15.2.96, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>137</sup> Lützow, 29.2.96, HHStAV, PAV/49.

Opinions differed about exactly what had been accomplished. Some prominent Conservatives asserted that Saxon Social Democracy had “received a blow from which it will not recover.”<sup>138</sup> Metzsch was not so sure: the first test of the new suffrage might be a “flop” for the government.<sup>139</sup> One of Saxony’s state ministers observed privately that he would be satisfied if the new suffrage merely prevented the socialists from increasing the size of their present caucus in future elections. He had no expectation that they would be eliminated from the Landtag.<sup>140</sup>

There was more joy in Berlin. The Kaiser expressed “the highest praise for the sound political sense of the Saxon people.” He added that “this time Saxony is leading the way in Germany.” Wilhelm also “showed himself very well informed about the details of the corresponding action by the Saxon parties of order.”<sup>141</sup> In March 1896 he told the Saxon envoy in Berlin “that He hopes the Reich will follow the Saxon example some day. But He will probably ‘turn old and gray’ first.”<sup>142</sup> Wilhelm was also pleased when Mehnert used the occasion of King Albert’s birthday (23 April) to announce that the Kartell binding the “parties of order” in Saxony had been renewed the previous day. To this agreement, which also renewed the Senior Assembly and the pledge of unity against Social Democracy, 108 deputies from both houses of the Saxon Landtag had attached their signature.<sup>143</sup> The Kaiser could hardly contain his enthusiasm when he reflected on the counter-revolutionary possibilities such a constellation of parties opened up. “Bravo! Saxonia!” he wrote. “What about us?! . . . That must be tried here! . . . Who could best take the matter in hand?”<sup>144</sup>

## HIGH TIDE

Maybe these parliamentary successes have gone to the head of this relatively young man, or else he feels the need—after the Social Democratic caucus has become insignificant thanks to the suffrage reform he initiated—to satisfy his lust for battle by other means.

—of Paul Mehnert, 1899<sup>145</sup>

Under a tyranny, the privileges of the strong are rights and the rights of the weak are privileges.

—Anonymous

<sup>138</sup> Strachey, 30.5.96, PRO, FO 68/181.

<sup>139</sup> Dönhoff, 22.9.97, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.

<sup>140</sup> Strachey, 30.5.96, PRO, FO 68/181. See also Lützow, 29.2.96, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>141</sup> Chotek, 29.12.95, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>142</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch (Dresden), 9.3.96, SHStAD, MdAA 3308.

<sup>143</sup> *DJ*, 22.4.96; *Vaterl.*, 1.5.96.

<sup>144</sup> Dönhoff, 24.4.96, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 4; cf. *SParl.*, 50; Schröder, “Wahlrecht,” 129.

<sup>145</sup> Dönhoff, 8.11.99, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.



Table 7.2. Party Caucuses in the Saxon Landtag, 1889–1907

Year	Cons	NatLib	Lib.	Prog.	Rad.	AS	SPD	Total
1889	48	12	1	11	1	0	7	80
1891	45	10	1	11	2	0	11	80
1893	43	14	0	8	1	2	14	82
1895	44	16	0	6	0	2	14	82
Introduction of the three-class Landtag suffrage (March 1896)								
1897	50	21	0	3	0	0	8	82
1899	52	22	1	3	0	0	4	82
1901	58	21	1	2	0	0	0	82
1903	57	22	1	0	1	1	0	82
1905	54	23	1	0	2	1	1	82
1907	46	31	0	0	3	1	1	82

*Notes:* The following changes resulted from by-elections: 1890 a German Radical replaced a NL; 1890 a SD replaced a NL; 1892 a Cons replaced a Progressive; 1896 a SD replaced a Cons; 1906 a German Radical replaced a Liberal.

*Sources:* *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 40 (1912): 273; RWA, 172; *SParl*, 212.

The Saxon Landtag elections of 1897, 1899, and 1901 demonstrated the success of “Mehnert’s Law”—with a vengeance. At each election Social Democratic incumbents were defeated. Whereas fifteen socialists sat in the Landtag when the suffrage reform was passed, that number declined rapidly: after 1897 to eight, after 1899 to four, and after 1901 to nil. No socialists were elected in 1903. The single Social Democrat elected in 1905, Hermann Goldstein, retained his seat in 1907, but he remained a lonely figure. Social Democratic losses translated into Conservative gains. After the elections of 1901, Conservatives commanded a two-thirds majority of seats in the Landtag, sufficient to block any constitutional amendment (see Table 7.2).

The Social Democrats’ exit from the Landtag was predictable given the number of eligible electors assigned to each voting class. Those numbers came close to the estimates Privy Counselor Merz had provided. As the framers of the 1896 suffrage also hoped and expected, turnout among potential Social Democratic voters in Class III fell off precipitously.<sup>146</sup> When all three classes are considered together, the overall turnout in these three elections was about 36 percent. Few contemporaries had these data available to them before 1903, when Saxon statisticians began to publish their findings.<sup>147</sup> For Social Democrats and their enemies, just one thing mattered: socialists were exiting the Landtag quickly. Only the SPD’s stunning victory in the Reichstag elections of 1903 invigorated a movement to revise the 1896 suffrage. The Reichstag elections of 1898 were a comparative dud, reflecting little outrage over the “suffrage robbery” perpetrated in March 1896.

<sup>146</sup> In 1897–1901, turnout in Class I averaged 66.1 percent; in Class II, 50.8 percent; in Class III, 32.2 percent. *ZSSB* 49 (1903): 10f.

<sup>147</sup> On the 3 LT election campaigns of 1897–1901, see AHMS reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5343, 5345, 5346.

HOLDING THE LINE, JUNE 1898

From 1890 to 1898, the battle against Social Democracy and anarchism had been waged without an Anti-Socialist Law. Would the Reichstag elections in 1898 approximate those of 1890, when the socialists had scored a breakthrough in Saxony and the Reich? Or would they look more like those of 1893, when "interlopers" had confused the distinction between "state-supporting" and "revolutionary" parties?

Anti-socialist rhetoric during the 1898 Reichstag campaign in both Saxony and the Reich was an understandable response to the widespread perception that Social Democracy was still a powerful enemy. Police reports documented a slowing of Social Democratic growth and a partial loss of confidence in the years 1895–98, but they also cautioned against over-confidence.<sup>148</sup> A brochure published under August Bebel's name in 1897 presented a picture quite unlike these police accounts. *The Implementation of the Law of Association and Assembly in the Kingdom of Saxony* chronicled cases from October 1894 to October 1896 when Social Democratic meetings and associations were throttled on the basis of Saxony's 1850 Association Law.<sup>149</sup> When this brochure appeared in 1897, August Bebel instructed a party comrade to begin assembling evidence of police chicanery in other federal states. The data had to be gathered systematically and "scrupulously," Bebel insisted, to illustrate how ruthlessly police powers were being unleashed against even the smallest Social Democratic clubs and meetings.<sup>150</sup> Bebel expected that this collection would make a "deep impression" on readers; it would also be invaluable to SPD speakers on the hustings during the 1898 campaign.

Contemporaries referred to the "policy of pin-pricks" applied by Saxon police to the "revolutionary" movement. Yet Bebel was correct to note that the authoritarian state now had at its disposal weapons that would have astounded Saxon government leader Friedrich von Beust in the 1860s. Liberals had vigorously opposed Saxony's repressive Association Law in earlier decades. Now National Liberals and Progressives sanctioned the same tactics. "Herr v. Beust," wrote Bebel, "if he rose from the grave today, would spring into the air with amazement if he saw everything that is possible under [Interior Minister Metzsch], and he would return to his grave knowing that everything he had accomplished in this realm was . . . the work of a miserable amateur."<sup>151</sup> As in the 1880s, the notion that opposition parties were given free rein to carry on their agitation during the "charmed interval" of "election time"—as though an armistice had been proclaimed—would have been considered a cruel joke by Saxon socialists in the 1890s.

<sup>148</sup> For the national picture, the following analysis is based on the annual "Overviews of the Berlin Political Police on the General Situation of the Social Democratic and Anarchist Movement." Fricke/Knack, *Dokumente*, 2:23–73 for 1896; 2:117–67 for 1898. For Saxony we have interior ministry files devoted to the same "problem." For the 12th and 13th Reichstag constituencies (Leipzig-City and Leipzig-County) we have annual overviews written by Police Inspector Förstenberg.

<sup>149</sup> Bebel, *Handhabung*.

<sup>150</sup> Bebel to Bruno Greiser, 25.1.97; BARuS, 5:89f.

<sup>151</sup> Bebel, "Einleitung," *Handhabung*, 2.

When the Berlin police surveyed the progress of the Social Democratic movement on 1 January 1897, they noted signs of “slackening,” “stagnation,” and “fierce inner struggles.” These problems had begun to afflict the party immediately after the elections of 1893.<sup>152</sup> The SPD’s difficulties during these years are well known: they included the inability to agree upon a feasible agrarian program and the emergence of reformism and revisionism under Georg von Vollmar and Eduard Bernstein. The Berlin police were aware that these issues created intractable dilemmas for Bebel and the party leadership.<sup>153</sup> The rapid growth in the membership of the party and its affiliated trade unions after the expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1890 also seemed to level off at mid-decade, as did the number of subscribers to the party’s newspapers and the willingness of party members to contribute dues. Nor could Berlin spies find evidence of a meaningful anarchist threat in Germany. This put the lie to over-excited claims about an imminent, violent revolution made in 1894. The agitation in Austria for suffrage reform in 1896 was of greater concern to Berlin authorities, lest it spill over into Germany. Two years later, in their report covering 1898, Berlin police pointed to continuing disagreements within the SPD: over the radical positions taken by Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg, for example, and on the issue of whether to participate in Prussian Landtag elections.

“Despite all these bones of contention,” however, the Berlin police concluded that “Social Democracy in Germany [was] continually expanding and it [had] recently won recruits in areas that previously had remained immune to its heresy.” The year 1898 once again showed that “the party leadership is still always able, at the appropriate moment, to pull together all supporters of the party and rally them together to common struggle against the political establishment . . . Although the outcome of those [elections] . . . did not satisfy the more insightful [SPD] leaders, . . . the overall result must still be characterized as an absolutely favorable one.”

What Berlin police observed in the Reich, Police Inspector Förstenberg also found in Leipzig. By 1896 Förstenberg believed that the local Social Democratic movement had reached a plateau. The criteria he used to measure the movement’s progress included party and union membership, newspaper subscriptions, the frequency and size of party rallies, the number of arrests and house searches, the success or defeat of strikes, the volume of printed matter, and much more. Bruno Schoenlank’s advocacy of an agrarian program had left most Leipzig Social Democrats cold, while charges of embezzlement worsened the mood. The socialists’ penetration of military ranks appeared to Förstenberg to be no longer much of a problem, and even Leipzig’s municipal elections in late 1895 ran in a smoother groove than earlier ones. Förstenberg’s reports for 1896 and 1897 again noted only a modest increase in Leipzig party membership, which stood at 1,897 at the end of 1897.

Meanwhile the SPD’s Leipzig wing attempted to circumvent or diminish the impact of Saxony’s Association Law. It did so by changing its organizational

<sup>152</sup> Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 2:23 (1.1.97).

<sup>153</sup> Ritter, *Staat*; Carsten, *Bebel*, 145–74.

structure. Whereas the five district associations had grown to six by 1896, Leipzig's Social Democrats reorganized themselves into associations with names that they hoped would make it more difficult for police to outlaw them. Förstenberg assured his superiors that despite these name changes, virtually the entire membership of the eleven associations he listed for 1898 was in fact Social Democratic.<sup>154</sup>

Even though Leipzigers boycotted the first Landtag elections (1897) under the new suffrage, elsewhere in the kingdom the cost of contesting Landtag seats was "very high"—in the range of 600 to 2,000 Marks per constituency. (In the Reichstag elections it was much higher: Förstenberg estimated the SPD spent over 15,000 Marks to contest the Reichstag constituencies of 12: Leipzig-City and 13: Leipzig-County in 1898.)<sup>155</sup> The Landtag results were below SPD expectations. Nonetheless, in seven of the twenty-six Landtag constituencies the Social Democrats contested in 1897, they won more than 50 percent of ballots cast by all voters in the first round of voting. Compared to the last time (1891) Landtag elections had been held in those same constituencies, Social Democrats had increased their support by at least 2,000 votes in five districts and by 1,000 votes in five others. The number of public meetings with a "purely Social Democratic character" rose from 159 in 1897 to 203 the next year. Nevertheless, Förstenberg cautioned against accepting right-wing complaints about Social Democratic terrorism at face value. In only eighteen meetings during the entire year of 1898 were speakers forced by Leipzig policemen to break off their remarks. And in only two cases were meetings dissolved.<sup>156</sup>

When Förstenberg tried to fit his findings into a larger context, he wrote that the Social Democrats were coming close to exhausting their potential reservoir of voters. He also noted that the party's ability to mobilize its supporters among the third voting class under Leipzig's municipal suffrage was declining. Yet, precisely because Social Democrats were now disadvantaged by weighted suffrages in both Landtag and municipal elections, Förstenberg concluded that the party's advancement under universal suffrage was likely to continue. The veil that hid Förstenberg's call for a *coup* against the Reichstag suffrage was very thin. The Reichstag elections of 1898, he wrote, "again showed that Social Democracy in general is still expanding and that the Social Democratic Party's strength relative to the other parties is becoming continually less favorable *as long as the present [Reichstag] suffrage remains in place*."<sup>157</sup> Förstenberg continued by noting that "one cannot fail to recognize that the ideas of Social Democracy are striking further roots, however slowly, among certain strata of the population, and that circles of people who previously stood completely aloof from Social Democracy or were apathetic

<sup>154</sup> See the figure on Social Democratic and free trade union membership in Leipzig (1893–8) in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>155</sup> Förstenberg counted a total of 124 SPD rallies for the 1898 RT elections: thirty-two in 12: Leipzig-City and ninety-two in 13: Leipzig-County. The non-socialist parties mounted only thirty-two rallies: twenty-three in the city proper and nine in Leipzig's hinterland.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Krug, "Reports," and idem, "Civil Liberties."

<sup>157</sup> Emphasis added. Cf. Niethammer's worried prediction, 7.11.97 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 955.

are becoming interested in it." Arithmetic bolstered Förstenberg's conclusion about the effects of Germany's social democratization; it also demonstrated the mobilizing effect of the 1898 Reichstag election campaign. From mid-1897 to mid-1898, membership in the Leipzig SPD jumped from under 2,000 to more than 4,000. The Free Trade Unions in Leipzig showed a membership increase too.

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Saxon Conservatives did their best to attract antisemites and other protest voters from 1893 back into their party fold in 1898. The antisemites protested the Landtag suffrage reform in 1896 but they could not derail it. Thereafter, Saxon supporters of the German Social Reform Party began to bleed off to the Conservative Party. They also migrated to radical nationalist groups that were gaining a following in Saxony in the last years of the century: the German National Commercial Employees Union, the General German School Association for the Preservation of Germanism Abroad, and the German League founded by Friedrich Lange. Even more debilitating for the independent antisemitic movement was the continuing struggle for leadership in Saxony between Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg and Oswald Zimmermann. That struggle contributed to a gradual disintegration of the party's organization and activity in the kingdom. Whereas the number of antisemitic associations in Saxony numbered about 100 at the beginning of 1895, it had sunk to just thirty-two by the spring of 1898.<sup>158</sup> The independent antisemites fielded just eleven Saxon candidates for the Reichstag elections in June 1898. Some of those candidates received support from Conservatives and the Agrarian League. But Zimmermann's electoral manifesto warned his followers not to believe either "Social Democratic heresy" or "Conservative promises."<sup>159</sup> Saxon antisemitic leaders could only hope that some of their voters from 1893 would remain immune to appeals now bombarding them from both sides.

Kaiser Wilhelm's Königsberg speech in September 1894 had not dissipated the animosity between Prussian agrarians and the Reich government in Berlin. In the years to come, the growing strength and confidence of the Agrarian League kept tensions alive. In Saxony, the government and the Conservative Party both had good reasons to avoid being forced into a position where they would have to side with either the Kaiser or the Prussian agrarians in moments of crisis. As a result, Mehnert and other party leaders often reiterated that they represented the interests of industry, commerce, and agriculture equitably.<sup>160</sup> On balance Saxon Conservatives approved of the middle course the national party chairman Otto von Manteuffel steered in the second half of the 1890s. Manteuffel and his inner circle, which now included Mehnert as a member of the Committee of Eleven, successfully resisted efforts by the Agrarian League to make the Conservative Party its auxiliary.<sup>161</sup> This symbiotic relationship was put on display when Dresden was

<sup>158</sup> *Antisemitisches Jahrbuch* 1 (1898): 190–2, cited in PAS, 134.

<sup>159</sup> DW, 13.2.98, cited in PAS, 135. <sup>160</sup> *Vaterl.*, 21.1.98.

<sup>161</sup> DN, 20.2.98; Dönhoff, 4/20.2.98, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 19; Retallack, *Notables*, 131–9.

chosen as the venue for the first official party congress since Tivoli, held on 2 February 1898.<sup>162</sup> Manteuffel and other national leaders praised the Saxon Conservatives' moderation and good sense. They celebrated its success in turning back the tide of democracy with the Landtag suffrage reform of 1896. And they agreed that the "Jewish question" had lost none of its salience. From 1898 until 1903, whenever the call was heard for more forceful measures against universal suffrage, the prerogatives of the Reichstag, civil liberties, or Germany's "inner enemies," Saxon Conservatives were singled out as pioneers.

Chancellor Hohenlohe and his colleagues in the Prussian state ministry tried to rally the "state-supporting" parties to a coordinated effort against Social Democracy in preparation for the Reichstag elections in 1898.<sup>163</sup> They also tried to dispel revelations by the SPD and the Center Party that the right-wing parties were scheming to revise the Reichstag's universal suffrage.<sup>164</sup> A letter leaked to the press stated that "the non-socialist parties cannot be in doubt about their stance in the coming elections." Any patriotic German who did not approach the election contest accordingly suffered from "political short-sightedness . . . or lack of courage." Setting aside anything that divided them, the "state-supporting" parties were bound to recognize only "one political duty, the *common struggle against subversion*!"<sup>165</sup> This was strong stuff. It would have been stronger still if Hohenlohe had not instructed his state secretary of the interior to avoid writing anything that suggested a new Anti-Revolution Bill was being planned. Yet, in the Prussian state ministry meeting of 19 April 1898, Hohenlohe argued that the utter eradication of Social Democracy had to remain the government's ultimate goal. "The future Reichstag would presumably, like the present one, remain in servitude to the suffrage of the masses," he told the other ministers; "warnings and instructions would not help much." The Social Democrats would ridicule threats, he added, while "grand phrases about combating subversive tendencies would have the disadvantage that the propertied classes would be lulled into [a sense of] security." To avoid such a possibility, Hohenlohe said it would be better "if the government appears to remain idle." Nevertheless, he hoped that the fears of violent insurrection raised in 1893–94 would return to spur German burghers to action: "at the appropriate time one must annihilate [the Social Democrats], not half way but completely."

Disagreements arose among Saxony's "parties of order" in May and June 1898.<sup>166</sup> The Landtag session of 1897/98, which ended just three months before the Reichstag elections, had been contentious and unproductive. Metzsch's state ministry suffered shipwreck with many of its proposals due to opposition from the National Liberals (sometimes) and the Conservatives (often). Metzsch decided that

<sup>162</sup> DKP, *Stenographischer Bericht* . . . 1898; DN, 3.2.98.

<sup>163</sup> PrStMin meetings of 23.2.98, 4.3.98, 19.4.98, 8.6.98, BAP, Rkz 1817; cf. Fairbairn, *Democracy*, 92–9.

<sup>164</sup> On the RT suffrage, see clippings in BAP, RLB-PA 5849.

<sup>165</sup> BAP, Rkz 1817; Fairbairn, *Democracy*, 97f.; Dönhoff, 13.6.98, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 15.

<sup>166</sup> Dönhoff, 26.5.98, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 15, and for the following.

his government should not even present the usual throne speech to end the session: it had accomplished so little that the ministers would not have known what to put in it. As in 1890, this lack of legislative success was inauspicious for incumbents belonging to the “parties of order.” “Things do not look good,” one observer remarked: “As if there existed no common enemy, . . . the non-socialist parties are losing precious time in fruitless squabbles. The peculiarity of the German character, perversely insisting on exceptional positions and independent opinions, is coming to the fore here with ultimately dangerous consequences. Groups are breaking away from the Kartell . . . in order to represent their special views and to nominate their own candidates.” This observer was correct. The National Liberal Reich Association insisted on nominating its own candidate in Dresden-New City. Friedrich Naumann’s National Socials and the antisemites were creating headaches too. Like the left liberals they hoped to steal *Mittelstand* voters away from the “parties of order.” But it was the independent agrarians who complicated anti-socialist unity most of all. The Agrarian League, fully operational for the first time, threw its support behind any non-socialist candidate—not just those belonging to the “parties of order”—who promised to defend the interests of agriculture.<sup>167</sup>

In Saxony the “parties of order” avoided the worst because Conservatives and National Liberals ran against each other’s candidates in only two constituencies. Anti-socialist solidarity was best maintained in SPD bastions in western Saxony. Elsewhere, independent antisemites, Progressives, Radicals, National Socials, and the Agrarian League all complicated the picture too much for any “us-against-them” scenario to emerge. The antisemites’ strength among Dresden’s lower-middle classes was a particular problem. Both Dresden constituencies, which had fallen to the antisemites in 1893, were won by Social Democrats in 1898. As the Prussian envoy Dönhoff put it, the Saxon capital would be represented in the Reichstag for the next five years “by a cigar-maker [August] Kaden, whom Herr Minister von Metzsch described as a blackguard, and by a Jewish newspaper editor [Georg] Gradnauer who, besides his many convictions for press offences, was also punished for Social Democratic agitation among the soldiers during his service in the reserves.”<sup>168</sup> When turnout across the kingdom fell to less than 74 percent, the “parties of order complain[ed] wistfully that so many constituencies fell to the Social Democrat Party only because of the indolence of the voters.” The Austrian envoy was only half-sympathetic: “Over one quarter of the electors made no use whatever of their right to vote.” No Xerxes had identified himself to “drive the voters to the ballot box with rods!”<sup>169</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Disunity and apathy among the “educated classes” was cited in other campaign reports that reached Berlin, for example from Bavaria and Württemberg. See reports by Prussian envoys Karl Eduard von Derenthall (Stuttgart), 7.6.98, and Count Alexander von Monts de Mazin (Munich), 21.6.98, both in PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 15.

<sup>168</sup> Dönhoff, 10.7.98, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 15. Cf. Dönhoff, 26.5.98, 25.6.98, 10.7.98, *ibid.*, and Lützow, 2.7.98, HHStAV, PAV/49.

<sup>169</sup> Lützow, 16.7.98, HHStAV, PAV/50. When attempting to cross the Hellespont during his campaign against Greece, the ancient Persian king Xerxes I (486–465 BC) was impeded in his bridge-building by rough seas. He ordered his soldiers to whip the water with rods until it calmed down. For this sacrilege he was eventually punished with defeat.

**Table 7.3.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1893 and 1898

	15 June 1893			16 June 1898		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives (1) (3)	147,772	24.9	6	109,437	18.1	5
National Liberals (2)	49,554	8.4	2	89,060	14.7	4
Left Liberals	30,203	5.1	2	15,413	2.5	0
Antisemites	93,364	15.8	6	73,427	12.1	3
Social Democrats	270,654	45.7	7	299,190	49.5	11
Total votes cast/seats	594,506		23	607,444		23
Turnout (%)	79.9			73.9		
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives (3)	1,038,353	13.5	72	1,859,222	11.1	56
Free Conservatives	438,435	5.7	28	343,642	4.4	23
National Liberals	996,980	13.0	53	971,302	12.5	46
Left Liberals	1,091,677	14.8	48	862,524	11.1	49
Antisemites (4)	263,861	3.4	16	284,250	3.7	13
Social Democrats	1,786,738	23.3	44	2,107,076	27.2	56
Total votes cast/seats	7,702,265		397	7,786,714		397
Turnout (%)	72.5			68.1		

*Notes:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. For the Reich: caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*); Left Liberals include Liberals, Progressives, Radicals, and the People’s Party. The Catholic Center Party, ethnic minorities, and other small parties have been omitted for clarity. See <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>. (1) 1898: RFKP won no votes in Saxony. (2) 1898: Friedrich Uhlemann in 15: Mittweida was listed as “moderate liberal” but became a “guest” of the NLP. (3) Agrarian League and Bavarian Farmers’ League: Saxony 1898—0 votes; Reich 1898—250,693 votes; (4) Saxony and the Reich 1898: Antisemites (German Reform Party [*sic*]; Christian Social Party).

*Sources:* “Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1893,” *SBDR*, 9. LP, II. Session (1893–94), Anlage Nr. 46; “Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1898,” *SBDR*, 10. LP, I. Session (1898–1900), Anlage Nr. 77; RWA, 41, 89; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 296f., 319f.

Again the election outcome demonstrated Saxony’s typicality in some ways and its divergence from national trends in others (see Table 7.3).<sup>170</sup> Of all Reichstag elections in the Wilhelmine era, those of June 1898 were the duller.<sup>171</sup> They were transitional, not transformative. The fragmentation of the “Bismarckian political universe” had taken place in 1890 and 1893. After 1900, participation rates rose again and new party constellations began to form.<sup>172</sup> Yet, in Saxony, the suffrage reform of 1896 *was* transformative, in an anti-democratic direction. Saxony’s

<sup>170</sup> See maps showing RT elections and party bastions in Saxony, 1898, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>171</sup> From Sperber, *Voters*, 225, 229f. For the 1890, 1893, and 1898 Reichstag elections, see color maps published by the Royal Statistical Office; Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>172</sup> As noted in Fairbairn, *Democracy*.



new three-class suffrage could not halt Germany's social democratization. But it impeded Saxony's political democratization for more than a decade.

#### HUBRIS

Among the five deputies Saxon Conservatives sent to the Reichstag after 1898, their two stars, Arnold von Frege and Georg Oertel, were confirmed agrarians and confirmed antisemites. Both men did their best to ensure that Baron von Friesen-Rötha's anti-liberal, antisemitic, and hyper-nationalist views infused the Conservative caucus in Berlin. Paul Mehnert, with different inflections, did the same in the Saxon Landtag.

As early as November 1897, Conservative dominance in the Landtag encouraged the "agrarian wing of the caucus, whose numbers are not inconsiderable," to press more strongly for the preferment of agrarian interests over industry and commerce.<sup>173</sup> Two years later the *Leipziger Zeitung* expressed concern that the "educated bourgeoisie in Saxony's cities and industrial districts" would begin to disavow their conservative views and perhaps change their political colors. The result might be either a general reduction of the Conservative Party's influence in the kingdom or the danger that Conservatives with urban or rural backgrounds and interests would go their separate ways.<sup>174</sup> These fears increased exponentially as Saxony, not unlike the rest of Germany, experienced a severe economic downturn in 1900–02.<sup>175</sup> The economic climate became more volatile as speculation and bankruptcies discredited the financial community (a whole book was devoted to *The Bank Catastrophes in Saxony in the Year 1901*). Meanwhile, Saxon agriculture and industry were embroiled in the national debate over the possible renewal or revision of the Caprivi tariffs concluded in 1891–94 and soon to expire. A compromise was worked out in the Reichstag in December 1902 after close to five years of highly charged debate. That compromise was very favorable to agrarians but, they said, not favorable enough, thus bringing upon themselves new charges of agrarian extremism.

This drama had its counterpart in Saxony, where pending tax legislation raised the level of animosity between representatives of agriculture and industry. On the strength of their unassailable majority, Saxon Conservatives delivered a rebuke to National Liberals and to Metzsch's state ministry. They charged Finance Minister Werner von Watzdorf with incompetence in dealing with the government's deficit situation. They blamed the Saxon government—and the Jews—for Saxony's economic misery. Watzdorf was forced to resign, and his successor, Conrad Rüger<sup>176</sup>—one of Saxony's

<sup>173</sup> Dönhoff, 19.11.97, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.

<sup>174</sup> LZ (n.d.), paraphrased in Dönhoff, 13.10.99, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.

<sup>175</sup> The following draws upon Warren, *Kingdom*, 33–6; Otto Richter, *Geschichte* (1904), 164–6; *SParl*, 53f.

<sup>176</sup> Von Rüger after 25.5.07. See also chs. 11–12 below.

most conservative state ministers ever—began a regimen of extreme austerity. In this high-stakes game Mehnert was front and center.<sup>177</sup>

The Conservatives' pursuit of naked interest politics was blamed in part on a younger generation of Saxon estate-owners who were not, in the main, aristocratic. "The representatives of the old Saxon noble families who now sit in the upper chamber—those like Könneritz, Rex, Planitz, Schönberg, Nostitz-Wallwitz, Trützschler and so on—are old men, mostly over 70 years old," observed Metzsch. "But they participate in the work of the chamber with energy and selflessness. By contrast the current generation is indolent, apathetic toward politics and state duties, and shies away from the uncomfortable business of participating in the work of the Landtag."<sup>178</sup> Conservative hubris prompted other complaints. Eventually it came time to decide how to raise the 38 million Marks required to pay off the state debt, which had risen to almost a billion Marks. The Conservatives hijacked the government's tax proposal, which foresaw a graduated income tax whose highest bracket reached a modest 5 percent. Mehnert was in the driver's seat: he headed up the Joint Committee on the State Debt. This committee did its utmost to put the tax burden on industry rather than agriculture. Its complex tax proposal included a stipulation to exempt the working capital invested in agricultural enterprises from the assessment used for other forms of property.<sup>179</sup> Mehnert's tactical victory reflected his strategic superiority: Because he was an "all-rounder" himself he could swing to his side twenty members of the Conservative caucus whose ties were mainly to Saxon business.

As head of Saxony's Agricultural Credit Association since the 1880s, Mehnert's influence in agrarian circles had grown substantially by 1900. In that year his association had more than 15,000 members; its outstanding loans stood at over 321 million Marks; its bonds and letters of credit exceeded 277 million Marks; and it held reserves of almost 3.3 million Marks. Not only farmers and estate owners, but whole communities, fell into a dependent relationship because their members relied on the credit—and, by extension, the political advocacy—that Mehnert could offer. In 1899, at the age of only forty-seven, Mehnert succeeded his father-in-law Gustav Ackermann as president of the Landtag's lower house.

Shortly after Mehnert began his vendetta against Finance Minister Watzdorf, Metzsch and the Prussian envoy shared their thoughts about what the ascendancy of a man like Mehnert meant for Saxony's future.<sup>180</sup> Dönhoff observed that Mehnert's rise had been fueled by his biting attacks on the SPD, his rhetorical talent, and his long-standing efforts to unite the non-socialist parties. But the warning flags could not be missed, as Dönhoff reported to Berlin. "In recent days he [Mehnert] has entered into opposition against the government, and he became especially uncomfortable for the finance minister, whose bouquet of taxes he plucked apart yesterday . . . He has thereby incurred the disfavor of Herrn Ministers

<sup>177</sup> On Saxon finances, see Dönhoff's reports (1901–4), PAAAB, Sachsen 53, Bd. 4.

<sup>178</sup> Dönhoff, 17.10.01; also 14.11.01 for the following; PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Details in Warren, *Red Kingdom*, 36.

<sup>180</sup> Dönhoff, 8.11.99, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 5.

von Watzdorf and von Metzsch. It must have rubbed them the wrong way that the Conservative caucus chose to elect precisely this man as president . . . He possesses great influence, not only in urban Conservative circles but also among estate owners in the countryside, which means it reaches into the upper chamber." Dönhoff concluded that government leader Metzsch "would be well advised . . . to re-establish a *modus vivendi* with the new president of the chamber."

Of course Paul Mehnert was too hot not to cool down. But in the short run his anti-democratic stratagem achieved both purposes for which it had been designed: Saxony's three-class suffrage dealt a devastating blow to the "reds" and it tied National Liberals and Progressives more firmly to the anti-socialist Kartell. As Mehnert and the Saxon Conservative Party reached the apogee of their power around 1900, Saxony's other parties had few cards to play. Neither did Georg von Metzsch, the man constitutionally entrusted with charting Saxony's course into a new century.

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If we look ahead too earnestly to the birth of "Red Saxony" in 1903, we forget what happened in the 1890s. In Saxony, the leaders of all non-socialist parties and the mainly middle-class voters who supported them were willing to contemplate a fight to the finish with the "party of revolution." So were Saxon statesmen. Both groups advised Prussian and Reich officials in Berlin to steer toward such a showdown with eyes open. A coup d'état was not unleashed against the Reichstag, the German constitution, or universal manhood suffrage. But a crusade "for religion, morality, and order" carried forward the redefinition of conservative politics that had been underway since 1890, broadening its appeal to fearful members of the German bourgeoisie in the mid-1890s. For this reason, we should avoid the mistake of celebrating what did *not* happen in that decade. As an heuristic endpoint, the high tide of Saxon Conservatism around 1900 and the hubris exhibited by its leader suggests a different trajectory for Germany's political modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the 1890s we can also see how Saxony's government leader, his suffrage expert, and leaders of the non-socialist parties in the Landtag struggled to weigh the pros and cons of myriad suffrage regimes. Many of the options they considered would reappear in later years. These men established a pattern of judging the viability and attractiveness of each suffrage against a single yardstick: Would it prevent a Social Democratic majority in parliament? As we will see, Saxony's last government leader was obsessed with the same question in October 1918.

While the calculations of government leader Metzsch and Privy Counsellor Merz are revealing in their own right, more astonishing is their refusal to take the lead in proposing and defending what they defined as the best new voting law for their kingdom. Set against the backdrop of suffrage reforms elsewhere in Germany and Europe, where do we find a similar instance of state authorities abdicating their responsibility in a matter of such importance to social peace and political stability?

In Saxony, a coalition of parliamentarians demanded and successfully wrung regressive legislation from civil servants who claimed to believe in the principle of

electoral fairness. Conservatives and liberals schemed behind closed doors and manipulated parliamentary practice to defeat the principle of parliamentarism itself. With almost no resistance from the bourgeois public they represented, leaders of these parties ignored the suffrage regimes endorsed (however hesitantly) by their own state ministers. Instead they devised a suffrage that served their own crusade against socialism and democracy, and pushed it through with singular determination. To their long-term regret but their short-term gain, they made suffrage reform the single most important issue on Saxony's political agenda in the new century.

## 8

### *“Red Saxony!”*

It was the perfect storm. The long build-up to the Reichstag elections of June 1903 produced a headwind in Saxony that the enemies of Social Democracy could not withstand. Of course there were warning signs; but which were decisive? Social Democrats manufactured their own victories on the strength of their superior organization, propaganda, and grass-roots mobilization. Supporters of the Saxon Kartell were complacent; they also lacked the cohesion and know-how to address the issues that were most neuralgic among voters—“suffrage robbery,” an arrogant political elite, high taxes, a royal scandal, expensive bread. Few statesmen or party leaders reacted flexibly as the tide of protest crested at exactly the wrong moment.

After the shock of June 1903, many defenders of state and society threw out a sea anchor and temporized. Others were proactive, feeling that German authoritarianism, as in the mid-1890s, faced a crisis of legitimacy. This chapter explains how the shock of June 1903 revived the suffrage reform debate from earlier decades and reconstituted it as a more powerful and potentially transformative movement. Against the backdrop of Social Democracy’s most stunning election victory of the Imperial era, Saxons groped to find a new Landtag suffrage that would be equitable—as they saw it—and safe. The framers of suffrage reform proposals dusted off voting systems that had first been put forward in 1866–68 and 1894–95 and they devised new ones that had no historical pedigree. As in those earlier attempts to hold democracy at bay, they struggled to reconcile conflicting pressures for fairness, security, and good governance.

### HIGH STAKES, 1903

The outcome of the elections is the most splendid vote of confidence that could be given to Social Democracy’s present tactics and style of combat . . . All the accusations, all the suspicions that were brought into the field against us, this time with unprecedented vehemence, by the entire bourgeoisie—they have shattered on Social Democracy like glass on granite.

—August Bebel, June 1903<sup>1</sup>

A majority is always the best repartee.

—Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred* (1847)

<sup>1</sup> NZ 21, H. 40 (1902/03), 2:425.

With more than a little hubris, in February 1903 the Saxon Kartell parties allocated the kingdom's twenty-three Reichstag constituencies among themselves.<sup>2</sup> The Saxon Kartell was less compact than it had been in the 1880s. The contrast even with 1893 was unmistakable. Radical antisemites, radical agrarians, and radical nationalists could no longer be labeled interlopers—they were now ensconced among the “parties of order.”<sup>3</sup> As a sign that Conservative misgivings about fellow-travelers had evaporated, the *Dresdner Nachrichten* announced that the Saxon Kartell represented the “firm, organic basis” on which a “*general* national and state-supporting *Reichs-Sammlungspolitik*” could be built.” Upon reading that the Saxon “parties of order” had renewed their Kartell, Kaiser Wilhelm II asked, “When will the Prussians do so?”<sup>4</sup>

# ALLIANCES, PROPAGANDA, AGITATION

For Bernhard von Bülow, who faced the first general election of his chancellorship, the Reichstag campaign of 1903 targeted three enemies: Social Democrats, Catholic Centrists, and radical agrarians.<sup>5</sup> Bülow's wish to exclude the Agrarian League from the “state-supporting” parties could not be implemented in Saxony.<sup>6</sup> When told why a campaign against the Agrarian League would destroy the Saxon Kartell agreement, Bülow reluctantly conceded the point. Soon he was reading situation reports funneled upward from Saxony's district and regional governors that documented how fragile anti-socialist unity was. This was not a uniquely Saxon problem.<sup>7</sup> When Bülow received a report that the “parties of order” had competed against each other in twenty-five constituencies across the Reich, including four in Saxony, he was appalled.<sup>8</sup> Bülow and Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch tried to stage-manage right-wing coalitions behind the scenes. So did Conservative leader Paul Mehnert. He lobbied Agrarian League leaders in Berlin to moderate their demands, just as he would again in 1909.<sup>9</sup> Both times Mehnert achieved mixed success. Both times Chancellor Bülow thanked him for his effort. Both times Saxon voters did not.

The Saxon Conservatives' election manifesto offered little to attract new voters or retain the support of disaffected members of their core constituency.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Conservatives would contest Saxony 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, and 23; National Liberals would contest Saxony 1, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 21; the antisemitic Reformers Saxony 3, 5, 7, and 8; and the agrarian BdL Saxony 18 and 19. Only for 10: Döbeln was no agreement reached. *DJ*, 28.2.03; *Vaterl*, 7.3.03; RHRT, 2:1121f.; cf. Pr. envoy Carl von Dönhoff, 1.3.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16; and the new Austrian envoy to Saxony, Dr. Ludwig Vélics von Lászlófalva, 15.4.03, HHStAV, PAV/52.

<sup>3</sup> See PAS, 174.

<sup>4</sup> Marginalia to Dönhoff, 1.3.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Bülow circular (draft) to Pr. envoys, 18.5.03, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Dönhoff, 25.5.03; reply telegram, 26.5.03, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Prussian envoy to Baden, Carl von Eisendecker, to Pr. FO, 9.6.03, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> SSdI Arthur von Posadowsky to Bülow, 27.6.03, *ibid.*, citing the four constituencies of Saxony 9, 11, 12, and 14.

<sup>9</sup> Saxon envoy to Prussia Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch (Dresden), 20.3.03, SHStAD, MdAA 3316.

<sup>10</sup> *Vaterl*, 16.5.03; cf. *KdBL*, 23.5.03.

The National Liberal platform was similarly colorless and defensive, as it, too, had to stress nebulous issues: the defense of “national interests” and “national labor.” Pocketbook issues largely defined Reichstag campaigns after the turn of the twentieth century, when the conflicting interests of producers and consumers were pushed front and center. Tariff debates had monopolized public attention from mid-1900 until final passage of a bill on 13 December 1902. The so-called Kardorff compromise, named after the Free Conservative leader Wilhelm von Kardorff, benefitted German agriculture much more than industry. The SPD successfully depicted rapacious Junkers as “bread usurers.” Although Chancellor Bülow had resisted the Prussian agrarians’ maximal demands, August Bebel wrote that the tariff bill signified “a sharpening of interest- and class-conflicts such as no other German law has ever given rise to.”<sup>11</sup> Social Democrats also targeted indirect taxes, for example on tobacco and beer: like tariffs on foreign grain, these taxes stretched working-class budgets to the limit.

The SPD defended the political rights of the German *Michel* when, as in 1898, the Reichstag suffrage was rumored to be under threat. The Saxon Social Democrat Hermann Goldstein chronicled decades of right-wing grumbling about universal suffrage. He reiterated SPD demands for suffrage reform at the state and municipal level. And he urged his party’s supporters to stage a “military review” by turning out at the polls in unprecedented numbers.<sup>12</sup> According to Goldstein, if nine million Germans made use of their right to vote, equivalent to three-quarters of the electorate, Social Democracy stood a chance of winning one-quarter of all votes cast. (His prediction was too modest.) Lastly, Social Democrats attacked military expenditures in general and naval expansion in particular. They thereby attracted voters from parties that endorsed these expenditures: left liberals and the Center. For many Germans, the best way to register a protest vote in 1903 was to cast a ballot for the only opposition party left—the Social Democrats.

In Saxony, the 1903 election campaign presented the “parties of order” with cross-cutting pressures. They tried to defend the political status quo at home while complaining about how badly things were being run in Berlin. In this context, three issues took on special significance. First, Saxony’s non-socialist parties disapproved of Bülow’s hands-off policy during the Boer War. To them, it seemed that Germany’s role on the world stage had been needlessly diminished. The bourgeois Saxon press railed against Bülow’s “feckless,” “nonchalant,” “pusillanimous” refusal to get involved on the side of the Boers. “Orgies of Anglophobia” in Saxony portrayed British generals and soldiers as “mercenary ruffians” and cowards under fire. “All the old stories about Dum-Dum bullets and British atrocities” were trundled out. And British troops were “habitually accused” of “robbing the wounded . . . and ravishing women on all possible and impossible occasions.”<sup>13</sup> The British envoy in Dresden, Sir Condie Stephen, reminded London that “Saxony is the home of the Pan-Germanic League.” As such it was “a great stronghold of a very

<sup>11</sup> Bebel to Johannes Semler, 13.12.02, BARuS, 9:52.

<sup>12</sup> Goldstein, *Reichstagswahlrecht*, esp. 26f., SStAL, Sg. Vetter, Nr. 265.

<sup>13</sup> British envoy to Saxony, Sir Condie Stephen, to British FO, 14.3.00, PRO, FO 30/301.

virulent type of Anti-Semitism," and its most widely-read newspapers often expressed the hope "that German policy would soon return to 'Bismarckian' and 'truly national' lines."<sup>14</sup> In 1903 we see the beginnings of a nationalist opposition in Saxony, composed of Pan-Germans, radical antisemites, *Mittelstand* groups, and others.

Second, the Saxon *Ordnungsparteien* complained about Bülow's willingness to protect the secret vote through the introduction of polling booth curtains. Government leader Metzsch was blindsided in January 1903 when Bülow announced in the Reichstag that his government would now support this demand.<sup>15</sup> Voters in 1903 were also provided with envelopes in the polling station. Scholars disagree whether these technical revisions of the Reichstag suffrage had far-reaching ramifications.<sup>16</sup> Either way, for Saxon Conservatives this concession signaled a victory for democracy. They hid their fear of losing Reichstag seats with specious arguments: voting envelopes would "not be easy to handle by people who are used to heavy work and have calloused hands," and they would require "a very considerable expenditure of time."

Third, Dresden's court provided Europe with its greatest royal scandal of the early twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> In the second week of December 1902, Saxony's young crown prince, Friedrich August, awoke to discover that his Tuscan wife, Austrian Archduchess Luise von Toscana, had departed for Salzburg to meet her Belgian lover, André ("Richard") Giron. The latter had been tutor to the royal couple's five children (with a sixth, of unknown paternity, on the way). According to Luise, her flight was prompted by King Georg's threat to have her interned in Sonnenstein Mental Asylum for life. For six months preceding the Reichstag election of 1903, all of Saxony and much of Germany was abuzz with rumors and counter-rumors. The camarilla around King Georg botched every effort at damage control. Luise's "inside story" reverberated in reports to the German foreign office, the Berlin police presidium, and foreign governments.<sup>18</sup> She made no secret that her arch-enemy, besides her father in law, was Georg von Metzsch, whom she characterized as both a bully (toward her) and a weakling (in the face of the Kartell). Luise quoted Metzsch as having said, "I will ruin this woman, but I will ruin her slowly"<sup>19</sup> (see Figure 8.1). King Georg suffered criticism no less harsh. Saxon Protestants entertained suspicions that a Jesuit intrigue lay behind the princess's "removal" from

<sup>14</sup> Stephen, 8.1.01, PRO, FO 30/305, ascribed threats against British women in Dresden, lurid postcards defaming British soldiers, and more, to the work of Saxon "politicians," "journalists," and "professional agitators."

<sup>15</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 21.1.03; SHStAD, Mdl 5444.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Anderson, *Democracy*, 250–60; Arsenschek, *Kampf*; RHRT.

<sup>17</sup> Apart from works cited below, the latest treatments are Fetting, *Selbstverständnis*, 243–303; Müller, "Our Louise."

<sup>18</sup> See materials in SHStAD, Mdl 11060a; Berlin Pol.-Präs. to Saxon envoy to Prussia Hohenthal (draft), 16.1.04, on confiscated brochures, BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12856; Stephen, 22.12.02 (two reports), PRO, FO 30/309; British envoy to Saxony, Lord Hugh Gough, to Br. FO, 13.1.03, PRO, FO 30/313.

<sup>19</sup> Luise von Toscana, *Lebensweg*, ch. 13; Luisa of Tuscany, *Story*, 165.





**Figure 8.1.** Count Georg von Metzsch and Crown Princess Luise of Tuscany.

Source: Luisa of Tuscany, *My Own Story*: frontispiece (Luise), following 164 (Metzsch).

Dresden: she was simply too liberal and too popular.<sup>20</sup> Crown Prince Friedrich August emerged from the scandal relatively unscathed. But according to Luise's American editor, this "cuckolded pumpkin" displayed the weakness of character for which he soon became known.<sup>21</sup> Luise later recalled her husband's anti-socialist, anti-English, and antisemitic prejudices at the time of their first child's birth in 1893.

It was as easy for Saxon Conservatives to blame the election result on the royal scandal as it was for Social Democrats to exploit it. Conservatives cited chapter and verse about the blow to state and ecclesiastical authority; Social Democrats cited Marks and Pfennigs. Saxon voters were reminded that within a fortnight of his ascension to the Saxon throne earlier in 1902—when he had succeeded the popular hero of 1866 and 1870, King Albert—"Georg the Peevish" had requested that the civil list be increased by an astounding 3.5 million Marks—at a time when bank failures, tax hikes, and rising food prices were making headlines.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in 1903, the election mood in Saxony soured at the worst possible time for the "parties of order." Chancellor Bülow was attuned to this. One week before the election he urged Metzsch to escalate his efforts to avert competing candidacies

<sup>20</sup> GLAK, Abt. 49, IV. Gesandtschaften, Fasz. 2036, Baden envoy to Prussia [Eugen von Jagemann], Berlin, to Baden FO, 19.3.03: "That such fairy tales are believed indicates how fantastically tense public opinion is."

<sup>21</sup> Fischer, *Memoirs*, xv–xvi, 4, and for the following.

<sup>22</sup> *Vaterl.* 28.2.03, 7.3.03; Müller, "Our Louise."

among the Kartell parties. A “great victory by the Social Democrats in Saxony,” he wrote, “would undoubtedly be . . . understood as a demonstration against the dynasty there . . . That would be most lamentable indeed.”<sup>23</sup>

Royal scandals and press wars during the Wilhelmine era have attracted attention from historians.<sup>24</sup> The Saxon case substantiates the argument that the authoritarian state was losing its ability to steer public opinion. Anti-Jewish rants, anti-socialist polemics, warnings of Catholic conspiracies, broadsides against the new industrial order—these were conspicuous in the propaganda of Kartell candidates in 1903. As if to dispel the fog of war, *Das Vaterland* described Conservatives, agrarians, and antisemites as brave fighters for traditional German ideals, whereas left liberals, Catholics, and Social Democrats were unmanly and mendacious.

With ancient, battle-hardened standards towering above them, adorned with shining decorations . . . , the Conservatives’ enormous squadrons—full of the youthful fighting spirit of the Agrarian League’s manly regiments—are advancing [with] the [antisemitic] Reformers, who have become more cautious through past experience. The scattered handfuls of liberals . . . move forward—akin to a score of officers having lost their units in the fighting . . . The men of the Center Party are doing battle . . . accompanied by the Roman bishop’s blessing . . . The following of the Social Democratic leaders is comprised, in the main, not of convinced disciples of Marx’s and Engels’s fantasies at all, but rather of the discontented . . . Once these masses realize how unfruitful Social Democratic politics are in practice, the army of these fellow travelers will evaporate just as quickly as it swelled.<sup>25</sup>

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Red Saxony was born in June 1903 not because of other parties’ disloyalty, let alone due to the passing whims of fellow travelers, but because the Social Democratic movement had become so powerful. In the days between the main and run-off Reichstag ballots, one Conservative newspaper in Saxony admitted as much. “The power of Social Democracy is rooted in the organization, the inner unity, in the feeling of solidarity among workers, and above all in activity, supported by a willingness to sacrifice, for its party aims. The parties of the middle strata are fragmented.”<sup>26</sup> The reports of police chiefs and civil servants in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig document the Social Democrats’ meticulous preparations for the elections as they emerged from the (relative) doldrums of the late 1890s.<sup>27</sup> Membership statistics for the national party were gathered only from 1905/06 onward, when the SPD numbered 384,327 members and its Saxon wing numbered 58,305. But characteristically, Saxony’s SPD started collecting (and publishing) its membership figures earlier. Between 1901 and 1904, the Saxon SPD almost doubled in size, growing from about 25,000 members to over 48,000.<sup>28</sup> Between 1898

<sup>23</sup> Bülow to Dönhoff (draft), 9.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16.

<sup>24</sup> See inter alia works by Martin Kohlrausch, Frank Bösch, and Peter Winzen.

<sup>25</sup> *Vaterl.*, 13.6.03.

<sup>26</sup> Dönhoff, 21.6.03; PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16. Beside this citation from the Free Cons. *Dresdner Anzeiger* appeared the marginal comment: “correct.”

<sup>27</sup> “Übersicht” (1903–04), Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 2:352–80.

<sup>28</sup> Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 63. Corresponding totals for the other largest non-Prussian states were Bavaria, 35,000; Württemberg, 13,400; Baden, 10,608; Hessen, 14,404. Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:312.

Table 8.1. Saxon SPD Membership, by Constituency Organization, 1901–04

No.	Constituency	Social Democratic Party Membership				Percentage increase
		1901	1902	1903	1904	1901–04
1	Zittau	541	733	871	878	62%
2	Löbau	600	613	713	716	19%
3	Bautzen	264	305	344	426	61%
4	Dresden-New City	1,405	2,133	2,802	4,024	186%
5	Dresden-Old City	1,230	1,620	1,900	2,162	76%
6	Dresden County	1,837	2,188	3,434	4,927	168%
7	Meissen	751	898	1,400	1,526	103%
8	Pirna	910	775	1,209	1,152	27%
9	Freiberg	224	210	265	327	46%
10	Döbeln	824	1,169	1,500	1,300	58%
11	Oschatz-Grimma	233	279	427	715	207%
12	Leipzig-City	742	1,300	1,630	1,681	127%
13	Leipzig-County	4,890	5,557	7,000	11,743	140%
14	Borna	539	900	1,000	1,000	86%
15	Mittweida	1,139	1,486	2,077	2,108	85%
16	Chemnitz	1,580	2,000	3,000	3,970	151%
17	Glauchau-Meerane	1,068	942	1,750	1,490	40%
18	Zwickau	2,460	2,022	2,277	2,210	–10%
19	Stollberg	1,351	1,430	1,437	1,680	24%
20	Marienberg	328	348	438	638	95%
21	Annaberg	300	350	450	400	33%
22	Auerbach	1,266	1,543	1,744	1,737	37%
23	Plauen	1,099	1,117	1,196	1,370	25%
Total		25,581	29,918	38,864	48,180	88%

Sources: SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen der Landesversammlung . . . August 1909*, 29; rpt. Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 63. Slight errors corrected in column totals.

and 1903, membership in Saxony's Free Trade Unions rose from about 51,000 to about 95,000.<sup>29</sup> Across Saxony's twenty-three Reichstag constituencies, SPD membership rose at very different rates in this period (in 18: Zwickau it declined by 10 percent). In fourteen constituencies, membership rose by more than 50 percent, and in seven of those it more than doubled (see Table 8.1).

Other indicators show why the "parties of order" faced daunting odds in June 1903. Police Commissioner Förstenberg in Leipzig reported an astounding increase in the local party's strength between December 1902 and December 1903, due principally to the party's mobilization efforts during the Reichstag election campaign. Leipzig party membership doubled in a single year, from 3,537 to 7,069 (including 331 women members in 1903). Over the same period, union membership in Leipzig rose from 27,481 to 34,003 (including 2,450 women). Not counting the trade union press, the number of subscribers to SPD newspapers in

<sup>29</sup> Fricke, *Handbuch*, 2:974f., also lists trade union membership (1896–1906) in all five Saxon KHMS and all German federal states.

Saxony was rising quickly too: from almost 58,000 in 1897 to over 105,000 in March 1903 (that is, before the election).<sup>30</sup>

The memoirs of an unskilled factory worker provide a sense of how discouragement over "Mehnert's Law" was transformed into electoral success in 1903. Otto Krille earned eighteen Marks a week in a straw hat factory in Dresden. Shortly after the Saxon three-class suffrage was legislated in 1896, Krille wrote that "I had imagined that genuine turmoil would break out. That didn't happen . . . I had trouble understanding that. I had pictured the people as an armed guard, ready at any moment to defend its rights; and now I had to watch as a single parliamentary vote created hundreds of thousands of second-class citizens . . . I couldn't avoid a deep depression." The 1898 Reichstag campaign buoyed Krille's spirits somewhat.<sup>31</sup> But the difficulty of sparking a "revolutionary fire" was still apparent to party insiders in 1899. As a Dresden journalist wrote to August Bebel, "Certainly it would be nice if we were able to bring the masses to the polls, even without any prospect of success, in revolutionary protest . . . But we're not there yet . . . —not even in Saxony."<sup>32</sup>

By 1903, the SPD's organizational and propaganda efforts had produced the kind of successes that swept up thousands of Social Democrats—men and women<sup>33</sup>—in a mood of excitement and self-sacrifice. Krille recalled a night when he attended a large SPD rally addressed by Bebel:<sup>34</sup>

When I got to the "Golden Meadow" at seven-fifteen the hall was supposedly overfilled and had been barricaded by the police . . . [who] drove us back from the entrance—to a fence on the other side of the street . . . The hall was right at ground level and the windows were open . . .

The porter from the hat factory, a twenty-two-year-old fellow full of all kinds of tricks, was standing next to me. "Just watch!" he said. In a few steps he was across the street [and] . . . through the window.

The police lieutenant was furious and cursed both the policemen. One of them had to turn around in order to hide his laughing . . .

A few moments later you could hear: trot, trot. Mounted police were moving in fast . . . [They] rode into the crowd and pursued individuals until each disappeared. There was an older man standing next to me. He was overrun and fell to the pavement . . . The police were rushing at everyone like frightened bulls.

In the meantime Bebel had appeared and been led into the hall by the police. While he was inside giving his speech, the big mopping-up operation continued outside. The police were riding back and forth along the sidewalks . . .

<sup>30</sup> Dönhoff to Pr. FO (copies), 20.4.00, 15.4.01, and SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Parteitag . . . 1901*, 34, 76; all BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12855; Förstenberg report for 1903 (Jan. 1904) in SHStAD, KHMSL 253; Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 84 (for 1904).

<sup>31</sup> See police reports in SHStAD, PPZ 1302; LWRK, 87–92.

<sup>32</sup> Konrad Haenisch to Bebel, 20.10.99, cited in LWRK, 96. Cf. SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Parteitag . . . 1899*, 46–83.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Baader, *Weg*, 95–7.

<sup>34</sup> Krille, *Joch*, 108–15; translations from Kelly, *Worker*, 280–6. Krille's description of the 1898 RT campaign in Dresden rings just as true for 1903: on a huge rally addressed by Bebel, see Fö "Uebersicht . . . 1903," SHStAD, KHMSL 253.

What had been the point of the attack? The result was that the Social Democrat took a big lead in the main election and won in the run-off election.

After this violent encounter, Krille was moved by a “vague but deep hatred of brutal power.” On the day of the run-off, Krille stood on Dresden’s *Augustusbrücke* and distributed a poem by the “worker-poet” Ernst Klar. In it “there were no statistics about taxes or the burden of the army and navy, no criticism of Saxony’s pernicious conservative politics.” Instead it began, “You men of labor, you children of need, / For one last time with you we plead; / For the final charge in the fierce fight, / To take our share of our country’s might.” The poem struck a chord among Dresden workers, Krille remembered, “because there was a drum-like sound in the stanzas.”

Krille’s recollections conveyed the political, social, and cultural divide—albeit a permeable one—that separated the “reds” from everyone else in Dresden. “Of course election fever infected the bourgeoisie as well as the working class . . . Sometimes people snarled and slammed the door in my face without taking the leaflet.” The attitude of shopkeepers fascinated and amused this campaigner: “I had fun trying to discover their real feelings in their eyes and gestures.” Because they did not want to jeopardize their relations with clients on either side of the political divide, some shopkeepers accepted leaflets quietly. One Dresden butcher did not: after Krille put a leaflet on his counter and walked out the door, “a big bone whizzed right past my head and into the street.” When news of a socialist victory was announced, Krille encountered scattered groups of people, some of whom were cheering the victor. However, “One man said as he passed by, ‘It makes you cry how fast the reds are increasing!’” Yes, Krille replied, breaking into the man’s conversation, “soon the world’s going to be different!” “The answer I got sounded something like ‘worthless scamp, needs to have his ears boxed.’ But I was happy.”

The national overview of the 1903 campaign prepared for the Berlin Police Präsidium claimed that the tone of the SPD’s propaganda was more “embittered and unrestrained” than in any previous election. The party had recruited the help of shop-floor delegates, youth, and women as never before. A great SPD victory was almost inevitable because of the “indecisive and casual stance of the other parties and the lack of energy they often put into their election agitation.”<sup>35</sup> The SPD in Leipzig’s two constituencies distributed 6,885 posters, 90,100 handbills, and 1,022,000 flyers.<sup>36</sup> Of 145 election rallies for all parties in Leipzig’s two constituencies, the SPD organized eighty-two. Yet their rallies never produced disturbances. “By contrast, the election meetings of the *bürgerlich* parties often took a tumultuous course.” This sometimes occurred because Social Democrats infiltrated Kartell assemblies; “but a few times, because of the existing antagonism between the [left-] liberals and the Kartell parties, it came to pretty vigorous dust-ups in the meetings of both groups.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 2:353f.

<sup>36</sup> *Plakate, Handzettel, Flugblätter*. LVZ, 21.8.03, cited in Georgi, “Wirken,” 85.

<sup>37</sup> Fö “Uebersicht” (1903), SHStAD, KHMSL 253; Georgi, “Wirken,” 82.

In June 1903, anti-socialist unity was seriously compromised in eight Saxon constituencies—a number we have cited from the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>38</sup> In 9: Freiberg, a National Liberal candidate ran against Georg Oertel, chief editor of the Agrarian League's *Deutsche Tageszeitung*. Oertel represented the radical wings of German agrarianism, antisemitism, and conservatism; hence National Liberals (and left liberals) could not bear to support him.<sup>39</sup> In 10: Döbeln, a National Liberal faced the German Reform leader Oswald Zimmermann. In most other instances of anti-socialist disunity the interloper was a left liberal.

Contemporary observers paid scant attention to left-liberal or Catholic candidates who helped Social Democrats to victory. These rivals were still marginalized in the Saxon party system, as they had been since the 1880s. Their candidates were distractions and annoyances—flies in the Kartell ointment. Nor did contemporaries take much notice that a wide swath of constituencies in central Saxony—stretching from 3: Bautzen in the east to 12: Leipzig in the north-west—was contested on behalf of the Kartell either by radical antisemites themselves or by Conservatives and National Liberals who spouted antisemitic dogma. Saxon civil servants and German diplomats seemed willfully blind to the antisemitic substance lying beneath Kartell expedience in Saxony's heartland. The antisemitic parties' failure to maintain the momentum they had generated in 1890–93 did not preclude the integration of radical antisemitism into mainstream political thought. This development is more evident in Saxony than anywhere else in the Reich. The number of votes cast for “independent” antisemitic candidates in Saxony did not reflect their downfall: it was over 73,000 in both 1898 and 1903. If anything, relations between antisemites and other Saxons who opposed Social Democracy became more congenial. Reichstag election battles in 1903 illustrated this situation for the first time.

The other main factors contributing to Social Democratic victories in 1903 were the same ones that Carl von Dönhoff and other envoys had been citing for years: “a lack of suitable candidates, indecisiveness, indifference, unwillingness to sacrifice with regard to the necessary financial resources, [and] insubordination and cantankerousness among the individual party groupings.”<sup>40</sup> The Kartell parties were hamstrung by their late start in campaigning, their reliance on the written word over the spoken one, their inability to silence Social Democrats who infiltrated their rallies and caused tumults, and the unwillingness of some publicans to make their meeting rooms available to *any* party (fearing a boycott from either the military or the Social Democrats). As one district governor reported, this unwillingness helped the Social Democrats more than the Kartell parties. In some districts, the banning

<sup>38</sup> In Saxony 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 23. My totals are higher than Ritter, “Wahlen,” 69; but see RHRT and election statistics in the *SBDR*.

<sup>39</sup> *DZ* (n.d.), advocating LL run-off support for the SPD, not Oertel, in Dönhoff, 21.6.03; cf. KHM Schmiedel (Dresden) to MdI, and KHM Ehrenstein (Leipzig) to MdI, both 19.5.03, SHStAD, MdI 5388.

<sup>40</sup> Dönhoff, 3/11.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3. Bd. 16. See KHM Schmiedel (Dresden) to MdI, 19.5.03, SHStAD MdI 5388; cf. KHMS Zwickau, “Uebersicht” (4.6.03), *ibid*.

of outdoor Social Democratic meetings caused no complications. In others, police and other civil servants had to be more circumspect.<sup>41</sup>

One regional governor described the electoral “terrorism” unleashed not only by Social Democrats but also by other “unreliables” seeking to exploit general discontent. “Election agitation everywhere is being pursued most vigorously. In this regard, the Social Democrats, as always, stand at the top: in ferocity and abusiveness, their attacks and their tone outpace those of their opponents, as far as that is possible. But even the liberals, insofar as they have not joined the Kartell of parties of order, the National Socials, and the representatives of the Radical People’s Party use language in their election manifestos and other pronouncements that one would hardly expect of men from these kinds of professions and with this degree of education.”

The “parties of order” were on the defensive: “they are doing their best (in the opinion of this regional office).” However, one of this governor’s subordinates felt that Kartell supporters in 13: Leipzig-County were showing a distinct lack of effort. Another one complained that in parts of his district—“because of the removal of the local garrison”—one found only “apathy and half-heartedness” among burghers who “should constitute the bulk of conservative-minded voters.”<sup>42</sup>

Finding candidates willing to face the challenges of campaigning in the age of universal suffrage was the biggest problem encountered by the Kartell parties in 1903, as so often before. Some constituencies that had been “assigned” to one Kartell party ended up being represented by another. In one of them, no fewer than twelve potential candidates were approached before someone proved willing to stand for election. In 17: Glauchau-Meerene, a Conservative was nominated by the Kartell parties, even though the National Liberals had been allocated this riding. After giving “a few election speeches” he spent the rest of the campaign on vacation outside Saxony. As a result, local Kartell agitation fell to “null.” His Social Democratic opponent scored a first-ballot victory with 71 percent of the vote.

During the 1903 campaign we see the early shoots of renewed National Liberal self-confidence. This induced a number of local National Liberal election committees to defy their regional party leaders. They tended to do so when the latter asked them to support radical agrarians or radical antisemites. Even antisemites were prone to in-fighting. Although they were still technically united in one party, in March 1903 they had reverted to using the designations German Social (for the Liebermann von Sonnenberg wing) and German Reformer (followers of Oswald Zimmermann). In 12: Leipzig-City, neither wing wanted to cede the nomination to the other. Though about two-thirds of these conflicts were overcome in time to field a common candidate against a Social Democrat on the main ballot, resentments seethed within the Kartell. Government leader Metzsch could do little more than make excuses for the inability of Conservatives to mobilize the Right.

<sup>41</sup> KHM Ehrenstein (Leipzig) to MdI, 19.5.03; KHM Schmiedel (Dresden) to MdI, 6.6.03, SHStAD, MdI 5388.

<sup>42</sup> KHM Ehrenstein (Leipzig) to MdI, 12.6.03, *ibid.*

This Reichstag election was the only one in the history of Imperial Germany marked by an overall rise in the turnout rate *and* a victory for the Left.<sup>43</sup>

Saxony's self-proclaimed defenders of throne and altar had no right to be surprised when the first election results were announced late in the evening of 16 June 1903. They were surprised anyway, having underestimated the party's growth and the dedication of members like Otto Krille. Political insiders had seen the writing on the wall. The SPD's caucus of fifty-six members (1898) was sure to grow. "In Berlin one reckons with an increase of 10 Social Democratic deputies, whereas in Dresden one has braced oneself for 20 to 30."<sup>44</sup> Karl Kautsky hoped for 2.5 million votes and about seventy Reichstag seats.<sup>45</sup> In Saxony, where Social Democrats already held twelve of twenty-three Reichstag seats, district and regional governors thought the number of Saxon SPD deputies might number in the high teens after the election.<sup>46</sup> Even this estimate was too low. On the main ballot (16 June 1903), the SPD captured eighteen Saxon seats outright. Nine days later they fought run-off contests in the remaining five constituencies, of which they won four—much higher than their average success rate in the Reich. When Saxons awoke on 26 June 1903, twenty-two of twenty-three constituencies were held by Social Democrats. The lone non-socialist victor was the antisemite Heinrich Gräfe, who won in 3: Bautzen.<sup>47</sup> Overall, almost three of every five Saxon voters in 1903 cast their ballot for a Social Democrat. In the Berlin Reichstag, Saxon Social Democrats constituted well over one-quarter of the SPD caucus (twenty-two of eighty-one) (Table 8.2). The *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* published an "ebullient triumphal hymn to the 'red kingdom of Saxony.'" *Vorwärts* proclaimed, "Germany must become what Saxony is!"<sup>48</sup>

As always, the SPD was disproportionately strong in large urban centers and industrialized districts (see Table 8.3). In Saxony's largest cities, it is true, the SPD faced challenges that limited its attractiveness to certain blocs of voters.<sup>49</sup> In the trading center of Leipzig, in the government capital of Dresden, and in the young metropolis of Plauen, relatively large populations of civil servants and salaried employees contributed to close contests. By contrast, in neighboring

<sup>43</sup> As noted in Sperber, *Voters*.

<sup>44</sup> Referring to the SPD's overall RT caucus. GLAK, Abt. 49, IV. Gesandtschaften, Fasz. 1ff. Bayern, Fasc. 64, report of 4.5.03 on Baron Clemens von Podewils' visit to Berlin and Dresden. Cf. Lermann, *Chancellor*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 2:354.

<sup>46</sup> KHMS reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5388; LZ, 14.5.03; Dönhoff, 25.5.03, PAAAB, Deutschland No. 125, No. 3, Bd. 16; Vélcs, 17.6.03, HHStAV, PAV/52.

<sup>47</sup> Emil Heinrich Gräfe was a flower merchant, businessman, wine trader, and assemblyman in Bischofswerda. On his campaign see KHM Schlieben (Bautzen) to Mdl, 8.6.03, and other reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5388; RHRT 2:1130–33. Gräfe tapped a reservoir of Cons, NL, BdL, and antisemitic supporters who stayed home on the first ballot. Turnout in 3: Bautzen rose from 53.7 percent in 1898 to 73.2 percent in 1903 (both on the main ballots) and then to 83.4 percent in the 1903 run-off. Gräfe held 3: Bautzen from 1893 until his death in 1917. On the by-election of 1917, see ch. 14.

<sup>48</sup> SAZ in Dönhoff, 18.6.03, cited previously; *Viv*, cited in Warren, *Kingdom*, 41. See maps showing the RT elections and party bastions in Saxony, 1903, both in the Online Supplement, <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>49</sup> Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 64–70, for some of the following figures and analysis.



Table 8.2. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1898 and 1903

	16 June 1898			16 June 1903		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives	109,437	18.0	5	85,321	11.3	0
National Liberals	89,060	14.6	4	97,869	13.0	0
Left Liberals	15,413	2.6	0	46,769	6.2	0
Antisemites	73,427	12.1	3	73,656	9.8	1
Social Democrats	299,190	49.3	11	441,764	58.5	22
Total votes cast/seats	607,444	/	23	754,894	/	23
Turnout (%) main/ <i>run-off</i>	73.9	/	81.6	83.0	/	86.5
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	1,859,222	11.1	56	948,448	10.0	54
Free Conservatives	343,642	4.4	23	333,404	3.5	21
National Liberals	971,302	12.5	46	1,317,401	13.9	51
Left Liberals	862,524	11.1	49	872,653	9.2	36
Antisemites	284,250	3.7	13	244,543	2.6	11
Agrarian/Peasants Leagues	250,693	3.2	18	230,134	2.4	8
Social Democrats	2,107,076	27.2	56	3,010,771	31.7	81
Total votes cast/seats	7,786,714	/	397	9,533,826	/	397
Turnout main ballot (%)	68.1	/	/	76.1	/	/

*Note:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. For the Reich: caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*). Results for the Catholic Center Party and other groups have been omitted for clarity. See RT returns online at <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>. Saxony 1903: Left Liberals includes 25,966 (3.5 percent) for the Radical People’s Party; 14,880 (2.0 percent) for the National Socials; 3,333 (0.5 percent) for a “moderate liberal” (who tended to the NLP); and 2,590 (0.3 percent) for the Radical Union.

*Sources:* “Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1898,” *SBD*, 10. LP, I. Session (1898–1900), Anlage Nr. 77; “Allgemeine Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1903,” *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs, Ergänzungsheft zu 1903*, Teil IV (1904): 1–7, 45–7; RWA, 41, 89; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 296f, 319f; “Die Wahlen zum Deutschen Reichstag im Königreich Sachsen von 1871 bis 1907,” *ZSSB* 54, no. 2 (1908): 173.

constituencies—particularly 6: Dresden-County and 13: Leipzig-County—suburban workers built bastions of Social Democratic strength that were unassailable.<sup>50</sup>

In the Reich, the SPD did better in rural and semi-urban regions than it had in 1898, jumping by two to three percentage points in both types of communities. But in Saxony the SPD won a much higher proportion of the vote in these districts than elsewhere. It was Social Democracy’s surprising strength *outside* Saxony’s big cities that set off alarm bells in Berlin, Dresden, and even Vienna.<sup>51</sup>

It bears repeating that Saxon towns and villages were completely unlike the rural provinces of East Elbia—the provinces that Friedrich Engels wrongly forecast (in 1890) would soon be engulfed by a Social Democratic “wildfire.” In Saxony,

<sup>50</sup> On NL, AS, and SPD strength among voters in more- and less-densely populated districts in 13: Leipzig-County (1903), see the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>51</sup> Vélies, 17.6.03, HHStAV, PAV/52.

**Table 8.3.** Reichstag Elections by Size of Community, Saxony and the Reich, 1898 and 1903

	16 June 1898			16 June 1903		
	Population (no.)	Turnout (%)	SPD share of vote (%)	Population (no.)	Turnout (%)	SPD share of vote (%)
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Saxony</b>						
a) Fewer than 2,000 inhabitants	1,302,000	71.4	40.0	1,289,000	82.4	50.9
b) 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	1,056,000	73.1	56.8	1,118,000	83.9	64.4
c) 10,000 to 99,999 inhabitants	514,000	77.0	49.7	651,000	84.1	59.2
d) 100,000+ inhabitants (large cities)*	915,000	76.6	53.5	1,144,000	82.1	61.9
Saxon Total a)–d)/Average	3,788,000	73.9	49.5	4,202,000	83.0	58.8
<b>Reich</b>						
a) Fewer than 2,000 inhabitants	27,568,000	66.9	14.2	25,686,000	75.6	17.1
b) 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	9,197,000	66.9	32.8	10,895,000	74.9	35.0
c) 10,000 to 99,999 inhabitants	8,218,000	72.5	38.2	10,334,000	78.6	41.9
d) 100,000+ inhabitants (large cities)*	7,298,000	69.1	52.6	9,444,000	75.9	55.1
Reich Total a)–d)/Average	52,280,000	68.1	27.2	56,367,000	76.1	31.7

*Notes:* \* Large cities (100,000+ inhabitants) in Saxony: Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz. Population figures in cols. 1 and 4 have been rounded.

*Sources:* Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” Table 2, 58–9, based on *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* (1899): 83–101; *ibid.* 13 (1903), IV, 72f., 94f., 110f.

the proportion of the population engaged in industry, trade, and commerce was higher than the Reich average in every one of the kingdom’s constituencies—from a high of 85 percent in 16: Chemnitz to a low of 57 percent in 11: Oschatz-Grimma (these figures are from the census of 1907). Even Oschatz-Grimma was more industrialized than the Reich average of 55 percent (the Saxon average was 75 percent). As industrialization and urbanization in Saxony continued to swallow up agricultural and other rural precincts, Social Democracy prospered.<sup>52</sup>

When we bring together these data about socio-economic structure, turnout rates, votes cast for SPD candidates, and SPD membership in 1903, what do we see? (Table 8.4.)

<sup>52</sup> See LRTW, 38f., for maps illustrating the high industrialization and urbanization in Saxony’s southwest region between Chemnitz and Plauen (Saxony 16–23).

**Table 8.4.** Social Democratic Party Strength in Saxony, by Constituency, 1903

No.	Constituency	Reichstag Elections, 16 June 1903				SPD Members			Reichstag Election Costs		
		Total Votes Cast *		SPD Votes **		Total 1903	Among		SPD Press Subscribers	Total in Constituency	Raised in Constituency
							All Voters	SPD Voters			
		(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(%)	(no.)	(Marks. Pf.)	(Marks. Pf.)
1	Zittau	22,397	83.3	11,265	50.3	871	3.9	7.7	5,200	3,759.53	2,259.53
2	Löbau	21,349	80.6	11,334	53.1	713	3.3	6.3	2,680	3,553.50	1,126.50
3	Bautzen	23,625	73.2	9,191	38.9	344	1.5	3.7	1,347	6,012.00	2,558.00
	<i>run-off ballot</i>	<i>26,926</i>	<i>83.4</i>	<i>11,333</i>	<i>42.1</i>						
4	Dresden-New City	47,666	84.7	28,379	59.5	2,802	5.9	9.9	6,630	5,564.92	8,164.92
5	Dresden-Old City	39,535	80.0	21,569	54.6	1,900	4.8	8.8	5,400	3,600.00	8,400.00
6	Dresden County	51,802	85.5	33,781	65.2	3,434	6.6	10.2	10,087	6,107.75	6,107.75
7	Meissen	27,779	85.8	15,191	54.7	1,400	5.0	9.2	3,308	4,761.00	4,761.00
8	Pirna	27,093	82.0	15,905	58.7	1,209	4.5	7.6	2,568	2,990.00	3,490.00
9	Freiberg	22,658	84.7	10,848	48.5	265	1.2	2.4	1,207	6,696.47	1,546.47
	<i>run-off ballot</i>	<i>22,899</i>	<i>86.7</i>	<i>11,835</i>	<i>51.7</i>						
10	Döbeln	24,326	87.4	13,162	54.1	1,500	6.2	11.4	2,790	3,783.03	4,589.47
11	Oschatz-Grimma	22,587	85.7	10,060	44.5	427	1.9	4.2	2,112	9,475.97	2,666.64
	<i>run-off ballot</i>	<i>23,419</i>	<i>88.8</i>	<i>11,697</i>	<i>50.0</i>						
12	Leipzig City	34,581	82.0	16,140	46.7	1,630	4.7	10.1	35,000	20,061.20	33,357.00
	<i>run-off ballot</i>	<i>36,453</i>	<i>86.4</i>	<i>19,839</i>	<i>54.4</i>						
13	Leipzig County	79,706	82.2	54,819	68.9	7,000	8.8	12.8			

14	Borna	22,481	83.4	10,403	46.3	1,000	4.4	9.6	4,000	9,749.29	3,631.13
	<i>run-off ballot</i>	23,617	87.7	12,698	53.7						
15	Mittweida	30,947	88.6	19,270	62.3	2,077	6.7	10.8	5,200	4,070.00	4,670.00
16	Chemnitz	51,392	83.7	34,266	66.7	3,000	5.8	8.8	11,000	3,900.00	6,500.00
17	Glauchau-Meerane	26,047	79.4	18,349	70.4	1,750	6.7	9.5	3,066	3,965.01	3,965.01
18	Zwickau	37,962	82.4	25,335	66.7	2,277	6.0	9.0	7,325	4,816.40	4,306.40
19	Stollberg	29,830	84.0	20,096	67.4	1,437	4.8	7.2	4,139	2,863.41	2,422.53
20	Marienberg	23,647	85.4	13,616	57.5	438	1.9	3.2	1,410	3,900.00	900.00
21	Annaberg	23,608	81.5	13,273	56.2	450	1.9	3.4	1,500	2,927.92	1,142.74
22	Auerbach	32,294	86.3	19,106	59.2	1,744	5.4	9.1	3,981	6,968.58	4,423.27
23	Plauen	31,882	77.8	16,406	51.5	1,196	3.8	7.3	1,800	4,013.47	4,329.84
Total/Avg. Saxony		754,894	83.0	441,764	58.5	38,864	5.1	8.8	5,293.48	5,371.28	5,013.83
Total/Avg. Reich		9,533,826	76.1	3,010,771	31.7						

Notes: \* Valid ballots only; percentage turnout rate. \*\* SPD proportion of all ballots cast (valid and invalid).

Sources: Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 58f., 65–8; RWA, 34, 41; ZSSL 54, no. 2 (1908): 172–80; *Vorwärts*, 13.3.04; SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen der Landesversammlung . . . April 1906*, 29; Specht/Schwabe, *Reichstagswahlen*, 2nd ed., Nachtrag 65–70; RHRT, vol. 2.

There seems to be little correlation between the number of party members in a given constituency and the number of votes won there by an SPD candidate. In some districts with strong SPD organizations—for example 19: Stollberg and 23: Plauen—the proportion of SPD members to SPD voters was well below the Saxon average. Yet the correlation is strong between districts that were heavily urbanized and industrialized, on the one hand, and those with large SPD organizations and high vote totals, on the other. It was no accident that the SPD's only loss in 1903 was in one of Saxony's most rural, agricultural constituencies (3: Bautzen), and that the party narrowly won a run-off victory in a similar district, 11: Oschatz-Grimma.

As soon as the polls closed in June 1903, contemporaries started to use these voting returns to explain what had just happened—and as oracles. Who, they asked, had responded to the SPD's "siren call"—party members, supporters, opportunists, grumblers, dupes? August Bebel conceded that the party had attracted many fellow travelers on the way to victory.<sup>53</sup> In the years that followed, SPD insiders and their enemies hotly debated this issue. Not all Social Democrats agreed with Bebel that if fellow travelers abandoned the party in future elections, they would be replaced by more dedicated socialists who would become party members. At the annual meeting of the Saxon SPD in April 1906, Friedrich Geyer noted that although the party had won over 440,000 votes in Saxony in 1903, during the past five years its Saxon membership had risen from about 28,000 to only 54,000. This increase was no cause for celebration, Geyer complained, because only one in eight SPD voters was an "organized" party member. He concluded that "our organization does not function as it should."<sup>54</sup>

Many other social groups besides workers were believed to have cast ballots for SPD candidates in 1903: shopkeepers, artisans, railway workers, teachers, and other lower civil servants were identified most often. Contemporaries also understood, at least dimly, what pressures had been applied to make them do so. But what grievances had these different groups of voters really wanted to register, and how could the "parties of order" steer future protest into safe channels? Answers to these questions were elusive.

Government leader Metzsch concluded that some kind of suffrage reform was needed to empty "the great bucket of discontent" that produced these "frightful elections."<sup>55</sup> Saxon Conservatives quickly suggested that repealing universal manhood suffrage for Reichstag elections would do the trick. Other voices were soon heard, advocating proportional representation and plural voting schemes. It was not just sour grapes that provoked Conservatives to complain that good Saxon burghers had been "robbed" of representation in the Berlin Reichstag: with twenty-two Social Democrats and one antisemite representing them, their votes had supposedly counted for nothing. As for the Landtag, the opposite problem obtained: How could a small number of Social Democrats be allowed into the lower chamber to

<sup>53</sup> The usual term was *Mitläufer*. Bebel (17.9.03), SPD, *Protokoll... Parteitag... 1903*, 301.

<sup>54</sup> Geyer (17.4.06), SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll... Parteitag... 1906*, 41. Geyer had reason to chide SPD organizations in Saxony 3, 9, 20, and 21 for their low membership figures. See Table 8.1.

<sup>55</sup> Metzsch cited in Gough, 8.7.03, PRO, FO 30/313.

represent the interests of workers without allowing the “party of revolution” to flood the chamber? How could the government and the parties that supported it “correct any mistakes they might have made in the past”<sup>56</sup> without reverting to the status quo ante, namely, the crisis situation of 1895 that had prompted introduction of the hated three-class suffrage in the first place? A different kind of crisis management was called for after June 1903. The divisive issue of Landtag suffrage reform would have to be taken up once again. The penalty would be great if barriers to a fair and equal vote were set too low—or too high.

## REACTIONS

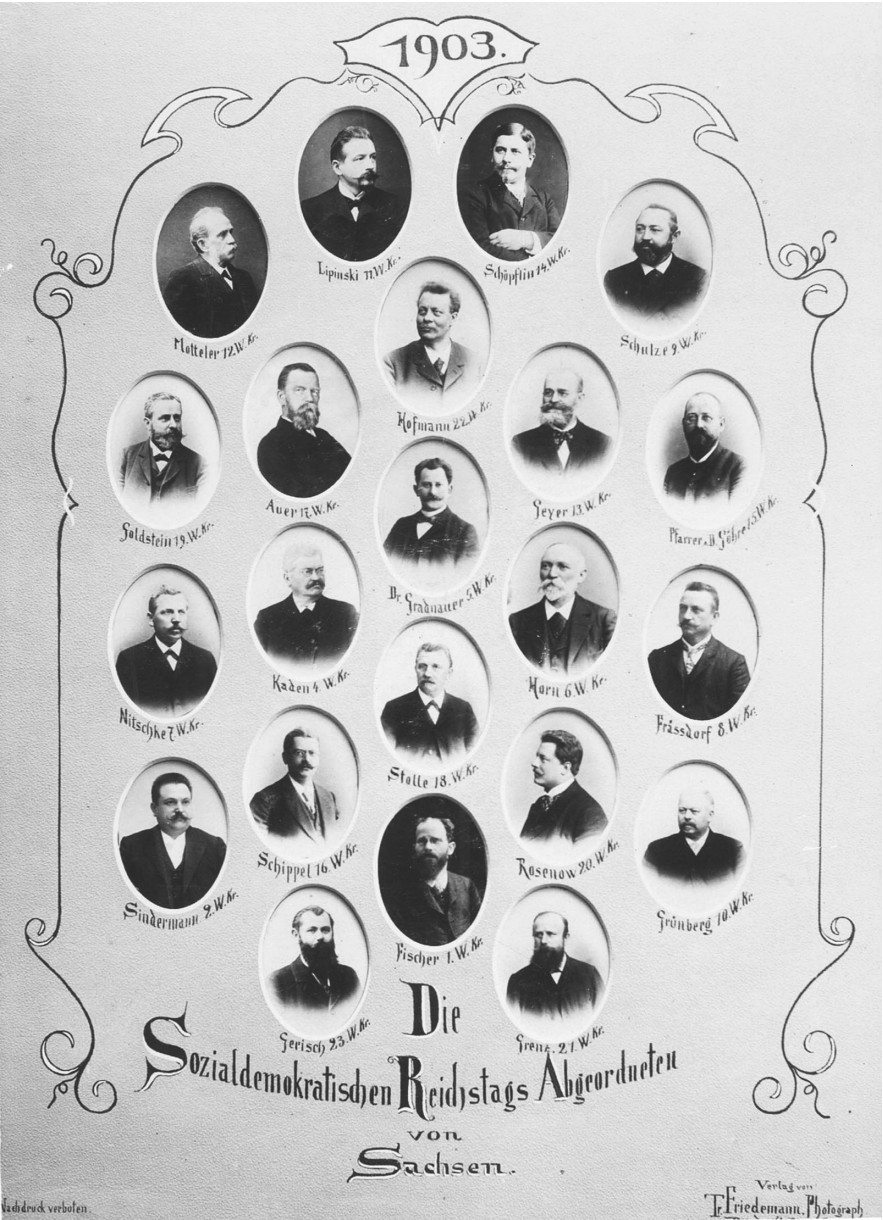
During the global financial meltdown in November 2008, Rahm Emanuel, chief of staff to US President Barack Obama, famously told an interviewer, “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.” A crisis, he added, represents “an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.” For both the Left and the Right in Germany, the political crisis that bracketed the Reichstag elections of June 1903 provided opportunities to redefine the threat of democracy in ways that had previously seemed impossible. Like the 1903 elections, this crisis caught the imagination of foreigners, from Switzerland to America, though few of them perceived the depth of the divide that had opened up between Germany’s rulers and those they disparaged as the “voting masses.”

For Social Democrats, their election victory re-energized an older debate about the party’s “irreconcilable” enmity toward the existing social and political order. That debate reached its climax at the SPD’s national congress in September 1903 (it convened in Dresden and celebrated the birth of “Red Saxony” a few months earlier). Discussions pitted August Bebel and other defenders of Marxist “orthodoxy” against reformists and revisionists in the party.<sup>57</sup> The latter groups were led by Georg von Vollmar and Eduard Bernstein. They included such Social Democrats elected from Saxony as Ignaz Auer, Georg Gradnauer, Edmund Fischer, Max Schippel, and Paul Göhre<sup>58</sup> (see Figure 8.2). Yet most Saxon Social Democrats followed Bebel’s lead. Unlike their comrades in southern and southwest Germany, they had never been able to ally or cooperate with non-socialist parties. Hence they tended to see revisionists and reformists as “opportunists.”

Both before and after the SPD congress of 1903, the party was compelled to clarify its political course and parry its enemies’ attacks. In late 1902, socialist deputies in the Reichstag had tried to prevent passage of the Bülow tariffs by means of a filibuster. This resulted in “scandalous scenes” on the floor of the Reichstag on 27 November and 1 December, which the Kaiser would have been happy to see escalate. During the subsequent election campaign the “parties of order” cited the SPD’s threat to civilized parliamentary practice as a means to deflect attention away

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. <sup>57</sup> SPD, *Protokoll . . . Parteitag . . . 1903*.

<sup>58</sup> PAAAB, Eur. Gen. No. 82, No. 1, Bd. 19; Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Count Eduard de Garnerin von Montgelas, 2/28.3.04 (drafts), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962; Dönhoff, 19.11.03, 2/26.3.04, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 17. On SPD revisionism in Saxony, see LWRK, 93–8.



**Figure 8.2.** The Twenty-Two Social Democratic Reichstag Deputies from Saxony, 1903. SPD postcard.

Source: Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, Postkartensammlung 6/CARD000260.

from the tariffs themselves. Bebel was convinced that under these circumstances, whereby "all legislative constraints had been trampled upon," a Social Democratic victory in the next elections would prompt a revision of universal manhood suffrage.<sup>59</sup> So he went on the offensive.

On 22 January 1903, Bebel delivered a vitriolic speech in the Reichstag, attacking the Kaiser for his irresponsible and bombastic statements. Bebel wanted to crystalize anti-monarchist sentiment among German workers, but he knowingly expressed the same dissatisfaction with Wilhelm's interventions that were shared by many German burghers. Replying indirectly to the Kaiser's charge that the SPD sowed class hatred, Bebel asked his listeners whether it was any wonder that "*hatred* against the person of the Kaiser is growing among those he attacks?"<sup>60</sup> For thirteen years, Bebel continued, his party had been denounced as the "inner enemy." It was already Germany's strongest party, "by far." Soon it would be stronger still, "and step by step we will win over the majority of German voters and perhaps one day the majority of [Reichstag] deputies." Bebel's *Kaiserrede* exploded like a bombshell, as Helmuth von Gerlach later recalled: "Those on the Right raged, the Social Democrats cheered, the government representatives trembled, the whole house stood spellbound."<sup>61</sup>

In a very different context, Bebel again went on the offensive, during the SPD's Dresden congress in September 1903.<sup>62</sup> First in *Die Neue Zeit*, then in a series of speeches at the congress, Bebel turned the meeting into a tribunal against the revisionists.<sup>63</sup> What did the latter stand for? Referring to the SPD's "three-million victory" at the polls, Eduard Bernstein argued that the party had to offer its voters tangible achievements commensurate with the party's potential and proximity to power.<sup>64</sup> In the same month Georg von Vollmar declared that the party had to act in a "positive" and "reforming" manner to "help realize the great cultural goals of the nation." Doing so would represent an "expansion of the party's power" *beyond* what had been achieved on 16 June.<sup>65</sup> Bebel's ferocious response was to deny that the gulf between Social Democracy and the rest of German political society could be bridged. But Bebel also wanted to draw attention to the fact that his party and the Reichstag suffrage both stood under the Sword of Damocles after June 1903. In a passage subsequently quoted by countless enemies of socialism, Bebel declared that "I want to remain the deadly enemy of this bourgeois society and this political order in order to undermine the circumstances under which they exist and, if I can, to do away with them."<sup>66</sup> This was not the first time Bebel had chosen "to hammer

<sup>59</sup> Bebel to Schlüter, 31.12.02, cited in Groh, *Emanzipation*, 344. Former Prussian Chief of the General Staff Alfred von Waldersee had confided to his diary (4.1.03): "A policy that does not keep firmly in view the elimination of the current Reichstag suffrage . . . can hardly hold itself to account. At the moment we could still accomplish the change ourselves with a brutal act of violence." See Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 3:198–206.

<sup>60</sup> *SDDR*, 22.1.03, 7467–89; rpt. BARuS, 7/1:287–340, esp. 328–30.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Herrmann, *Bebel*, 569. This observation dated from 1909, when Gerlach was well on his way *von rechts nach links*.

<sup>62</sup> See Herrmann, *Bebel*, 564–85; Machl, *Emperor*, 371–82. <sup>63</sup> BARuS, 7/2:432–501.

<sup>64</sup> The *Dreimillionensieg* referred to the SPD's 3 million votes. *SM* 7, Heft 7 (July 1903): 478–86.

<sup>65</sup> *LVZ*, 29.7.03, *Vw*, 30.7.03, cited in Herrmann, *Bebel*, 568.

<sup>66</sup> SPD, *Protokoll . . . Parteitag . . . 1903*, 313.



on the revolutionary drum,” as Bernstein put it once. Bebel believed he had no other choice. References to his “tyrannical” leadership of the party—which Bülow used to attack the SPD’s “terroristic” campaign methods—did nothing to deflect Bebel from his chosen course.<sup>67</sup> His first priority was to maintain unity in his party. As he declared in Dresden, “Without unity of principles and convictions, without unity of purpose, [there can be] . . . no enthusiasm for the struggle, no opportunity to bring the regiments, brigades, and army corps into combat, to conduct the battle, and to achieve victory.”<sup>68</sup>

One issue touched on during the Dresden party congress was the political mass strike. It, too, was seen by socialism’s enemies as an offensive weapon—to prevent the mobilization of conscripted troops in the event of war. Bebel preferred not to discuss it openly because doing so might tip the party’s hand about what circumstances would prompt its deployment. But the SPD leaders regarded the political mass strike as a *defensive* weapon, to be used only if reactionaries took concrete action to revise the Reichstag suffrage. When Karl Liebknecht—Wilhelm’s son—called for consideration of the “military strike” at the SPD’s Bremen party congress (1904) he muddied the waters, in part because this appeal came after a strike by workers in the Saxon textile town of Crimmitschau had failed.<sup>69</sup> Socialism’s enemies were convinced that a giant conspiracy was hatching among the “reds”: in their view, cautious statements by SPD leaders were meant only to conceal a revolutionary plan that could be set in motion at any moment.<sup>70</sup>

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The course of suffrage reform in Saxony after June 1903 was largely determined by the different conclusions that Conservatives, National Liberals, government leaders, and even ruling monarchs in Dresden and Berlin drew from the SPD’s near-sweep of Saxon Reichstag constituencies.<sup>71</sup>

As in the mid-1890s, the Kaiser blew hot and cold on the subject of a coup d’état against the Reichstag and a final showdown with Social Democracy. Despite Chancellor Bülow’s belief that “the German body politic is strong and healthy enough, given time, to eject the Social Democratic poison,” Wilhelm convinced himself that the “gang” of Social Democrats had to be eradicated root and branch.<sup>72</sup> In December 1903 he remarked that he would never have made Bismarck’s mistake of conceding universal manhood suffrage to the masses: How could it be that “people who have lived for years on alms should have the same rights as the most well-placed?” In the same conversation, though, Wilhelm acknowledged that he

<sup>67</sup> *SBDR*, 10.12.03, Bebel (38–54); Bülow (54–61, esp. 58).

<sup>68</sup> SPD, *Protokoll . . . Parteitag . . . 1903*, 228f.

<sup>69</sup> When Crimmitschau’s workers ended their strike in January 1904, the SPD’s victory of June 1903 appeared in a new light: “Saxon conditions” once again became an “expression of gloom.” *SM* 8 (Feb. 1904), 1:157, cited in Warren, *Red Kingdom*, 44f.

<sup>70</sup> See Groh, *Emanzipation*, 359–71.

<sup>71</sup> See Plate 12 for the elaborate *Reichstags-Wahlkarte des Deutschen Reichs*, 1903, in the series originally established by Gustav Freytag. See also the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>72</sup> Bülow to Otto Hammann, 27.9.03, and to Philipp zu Eulenburg, 29.8.03, both cited in Lerman, *Chancellor*, 83f.

had no intention of abolishing universal suffrage; instead he hinted that the right to vote should be supplemented with mandatory voting.<sup>73</sup>

Between the Reichstag elections of June 1903 and January 1907, the chimera of cooperation among all non-socialist parties was enough to fuel the Kaiser's conviction that “the band of Social Democrats must be dispatched with fire and sword.”<sup>74</sup> He was no longer satisfied with ritualistic declarations about the state's determination to win “the great struggle against the enemies of the monarchy and of peace.” Wilhelm upbraided Bülow for choosing this empty phrase, “which has been so grossly beaten to death through its perennial use in letters, notes, and speeches, that it has absolutely no resonance anymore.”<sup>75</sup>

For such actions Wilhelm found many supporters on the Right. Former Minister of War General Julius von Verdy du Vernois voiced the mood in these circles when he complained that the SPD's 1903 election victory was eliciting only a weak, vacillating response in Berlin. “What after all do the constitution and parliament mean,” Verdy asked, “when it is a matter of protecting *Volk* and *Vaterland* from the guillotine!” The Reich leadership did not understand that Germany already stands “with both feet on revolutionary ground, whose sewage fields have been fertilized [by] universal suffrage and coalition rights in order to cultivate poisonous plants!” Verdy had lately been thinking about the lessons of the French Revolution. Germany seemed destined for the same fate. “What could now be mastered with the suppression of a few rebellions, which would be easily done, will cost great bloodshed in a few years, and a few years after that could not be overcome at all . . . Things are already *much* worse than most people think.”<sup>76</sup> Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee also saw parallels with 1789.<sup>77</sup>

So did Count Udo zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, the Reichstag's Conservative vice-president and former member of the Pan-German League's top directorate.<sup>78</sup> In December 1903 he secretly petitioned Bülow to take the initiative to “stem the tide” of socialism according to the “Bismarckian model.”<sup>79</sup> Stolberg complained that social reforms could never satisfy German workers and that the SPD should never be treated as if it were “a legitimate representative of the interest of workers.” These errors had contributed to its Reichstag election victory in June 1903. Now that peaceful resolution of the conflict between the SPD and the state seemed out of the question—given Bebel's stance at the Dresden party congress—a “legislative initiative” by the state was urgently needed. The “liberal Philistine” could not be counted on to support such action, wrote Stolberg: he is “lazy of thought, self-interested, unable to act, and stands under the interdiction of liberal phrases.” Therefore it was of

<sup>73</sup> From an audience of 23.12.03, cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II.*, 3:196 (German edition).

<sup>74</sup> Wilhelm's marginalia of 13.7.03, cited *ibid.* 3:192.

<sup>75</sup> Wilhelm's marginalia on a Bülow memo of 27.12.03, cited *ibid.* 3:197.

<sup>76</sup> Verdy to Waldersee, 20.11.03 (original emphasis), cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II.*, 3:193 (German ed.).

<sup>77</sup> Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 3:194 (5.12.03), 3:198f. (4.1.03); 3:216f. (20.3.03). See also Saul, *Staat*, esp. 13–18; Saul, “Staat”; Saul, “Staatsintervention”; Groh, *Emanzipation*, 344–71.

<sup>78</sup> That is, the *Geschäftsführender Ausschuss*; Leicht, *Clafß*, 105.

<sup>79</sup> Stolberg to Bülow, 27.12.03, BAK, NL Bülow, Nr. 107; reply of 7.1.04 (copy), BAK, Rkz 2005; cf. Eley, *Reshaping*, 228.

“the utmost importance” that members of the Center and National Liberal parties wake up to the threat: “if the non-socialist parties do not band together and if they do not agitate for decisive action, then we will be on the road to one of the most pernicious revolutions” in history. It was up to Chancellor Bülow to lead the way (“*Mut zu machen*”). Stolberg, too, cited the French Revolution (and the Paris Commune) for effect: the Girondins and the Jacobins had been disunited, he wrote, but that had not stopped them from bringing the French king to the guillotine.

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How did things look in Saxony? In a letter to Chancellor Bülow written the day after the main balloting in June 1903, Paul Mehnert blamed everyone but himself for the rout.<sup>80</sup> He refused to acknowledge that Saxony’s three-class suffrage from 1896 had provided Social Democrats with ammunition for their Reichstag election campaign, and he claimed that competing *bürgerlich* candidacies were inconsequential to the result. Instead he pointed to the government’s recent cooperation with the Center Party in the Reichstag, the provision of polling booth curtains and envelopes (the “Closet Law”), government hints that the “anti-Jesuit law” might be moderated, and the flight of Crown Princess Luise with her Belgian lover. The “press orgies” attending the Crown Princess Affair had undermined the monarchical ideal in Saxony, wrote Mehnert, as had the “lack of nerve” shown by Saxon police authorities in banning or confiscating its lurid depictions. Considered together, these factors helped to assuage the political conscience of a man who wanted to believe that the SPD’s victory was merely an expression of the voters’ bad temper and poor judgment. Mehnert inferred to Bülow that no change in Conservative Party policy was required. On the contrary: the election debacle demonstrated that the 1896 Landtag suffrage could not be abandoned now or in the future. Without the three-class suffrage, Mehnert predicted, the Saxon Landtag elections scheduled for the autumn of 1903 would yield an SPD majority—a majority that could never again be overcome through constitutional means.

Although Mehnert had little trouble finding scapegoats, he did not mention other factors that were deemed crucial to the SPD’s landslide victory in Saxony by foreign envoys in Dresden. One envoy put forward the theory that the Kartell was actually counter-productive. The SPD had cleverly presented itself as a “catch-all” party: “many thousands of lower-middle-class voters” had come to see their Reichstag vote as the “*only* legitimate means left to them to express their dissatisfaction.” In part because artisans and shopkeepers interpreted SPD attacks on “big capital” as attacks on “Jewish capital,” the Kartell parties had been unwise to identify Social Democrats as the only enemy of the state. “*Without* the Kartell agreements,” continued this envoy, the election campaign “could have taken on a more lively form among the individual parties. The strongly oppositional mood of the voting masses would thereby have found its natural deflection” into support of one or the other Kartell candidates. Without any such lightning rod to draw off

<sup>80</sup> Mehnert to Bülow, 17.6.03, BAP, Rkz 1792; cf. Dönhoff, 18.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, Nr. 3, Bd. 16; Dönhoff, 7.6.03, 2.7.03, 19.9.03; PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 6.

their anger over taxes and tariffs and military spending, the “broad spectrum of those who pay the lowest taxes”—who otherwise “look on the political struggle coolly and in ignorance”—were led into the arms of the socialists.<sup>81</sup> Eighteen months later, this envoy’s formula for success was endorsed by the Conservatives’ *Vaterland*. To mobilize more supporters, each Kartell party should put up its own candidates for the first ballot, who would then rally behind the non-socialist in the run-off.<sup>82</sup>

The Prussian envoy Carl von Dönhoff did not think the Kartell idea was wrong-headed; it had simply failed. The outdated politics of notables lived on. Because the Social Democrats were firmly united, well-led, and imbued with “the spirit of solidarity,” they had every advantage over the “internally divided, loosely-organized group of non-socialist parties, who are occasionally brought together for the purposes of elections.” Dönhoff reported that indifference among a high proportion of *bürgerlich* voters kept them from the ballot box.<sup>83</sup>

In Bülow’s reply to Mehnert, the chancellor refused to accept Mehnert’s analysis of what went so wrong in June 1903. Instead he put the blame squarely on the shoulders of hyper-nationalists in Saxony who did not support Reich policy.<sup>84</sup> Their press, he wrote, “hurls insults against the Kaiser and the Reich government that are so perfidious, systematically hateful, and coarse that even Social Democratic organs could not carry on much more brutally . . . Everything the government does is subjected to the most petty criticism and grumbling. All great issues of the day are treated from the ~~standpoint of the beer bench~~ most narrow-minded standpoint.” Bülow cited the “outrage and clamor” emanating from National Liberal and Conservative newspapers in Saxony during the Boer War. He also charged them with “confessional demagogy,” noting that cooperation between loyal Protestants and loyal Catholics was “the prerequisite for a successful struggle against Social Democracy.” Bülow concluded that Saxony’s Pan-German and particularist newspapers had to be reined in: they had to “stop undermining the authority of the Reich government and disrupting veneration for the imperial crown.” (Bülow’s reply to Stolberg reiterated the same points.) Shortly after he wrote to Mehnert, Bülow instructed his press chief Otto Hammann to put this spin on government analyses of the recent Reichstag election. Hammann was to stress “again and again, with the greatest possible emphasis and wherever one can,” that “almost thirty constituencies [in the Reich] have fallen to the Social Democrats because of disunity among the parties of order.” He also instructed Hammann to specify the reasons for the Saxon disaster: “Giron Affair, collapse of the Leipziger Bank, Saxony’s inept financial administration, the coarse tone of Saxony’s so-called

<sup>81</sup> Vélics, 30.6.03, HHStAV, PAV/52.

<sup>82</sup> *Vaterl* (n.d.) paraphrased in Dönhoff, 25.11.04, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 7. The proposed slogan for the next elections tried to put a good face on the National Liberals’ refusal to renew the Kartell: “No Kartell, instead a free hand for the main elections; then the earliest, firmest, and most loyal possible Kartell—with a common action program—to produce nationalist victories in the run-offs.”

<sup>83</sup> Dönhoff, 18.6.03, cited previously.

<sup>84</sup> Bülow to Mehnert (draft), 24-26.6.03, BAP, Rkz 1792.

national press, etc.”<sup>85</sup> This was Bülow’s strategy to avoid being “sh— on the head” by “annoyed . . . party ravens” like Mehnert.<sup>86</sup>

King Georg and his state ministers wore a different set of blinkers. The Saxon king acknowledged that the SPD, because of economic hard times, had attracted the votes of many non-party members. But he could not understand how even dissatisfied voters failed to see that Social Democracy offered nothing but “negativity, demagoguery, and destruction.” How long would it take for these fellow travelers “to open their eyes and recognize that nothing productive could be expected from the party they elected as their advocate?” In his conversation with the king, the Prussian envoy Dönhoff proposed a thought experiment: “one could almost imagine giving the government over to the Social Democrats for a period of time, so that their impotence would be clear to the people.” King Georg would have none of it. “During this time,” he replied, “the socialists would destroy so many valuable achievements of the existing social and political order, without creating anything in their place, that it would hardly be possible later to repair the damage. The experiment is therefore too dangerous.”<sup>87</sup> A similar viewpoint was expressed by the Saxon envoy in Berlin, Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal, when he heard that the Reich government was reacting more “coolly” to the election result than doom-sayers in Saxony felt it should. It might be true, Hohenthal conceded, that the complexion of the Reichstag had not been changed dramatically in June 1903. But he also hoped the Reich government “would not overlook the warning that lies in the unheard-of increase in the overall number of votes cast for Social Democrats and in the very considerable minorities that Social Democracy has won in certain districts where it was previously known only by hearsay.”<sup>88</sup>

### A WAY FORWARD?

The socialist working class—despite its enormous preponderance among the population of the land—[can] never express its wishes and requests in the Landtag and therefore [sees] itself compelled to discuss and decide local Saxon questions in the Reichstag in Berlin.

—Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch, June 1903<sup>89</sup>

Reforms come from below. No man with four aces howls for a new deal.

—Anonymous

<sup>85</sup> Bülow to Hammann, 27.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16. Cf. Dönhoff, 26.6.03, *ibid.*, Bd. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Bülow to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 19.6.03, cited in Lerman, *Chancellor*, 88.

<sup>87</sup> Dönhoff, 23.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch (Dresden), 24.6.03, SHStAD, GsB, Nr. 259.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Vélcs, 17.6.03, HHStAV, PAV/52, also for Metzsch’s claim that the LT majority of 1896 had passed (*aufgetroyirt*) the three-class suffrage “against his will.”

Despite his later protest to the Austrian envoy that Saxony's three-class suffrage had been imposed on him “against his will” in 1896, government leader Metzsch had gone along with the Kartell parties' response to the “threat” of Social Democratic gains in Landtag elections. As we saw in the last chapter, at that time Metzsch was bankrupt of suffrage solutions that might have stood in the way of “Mehnert's Law.” He lacked the political courage to stand behind a suffrage system that would allow reasonable representation of Saxony's working classes in the Landtag. Yet, on 10 July 1903, Metzsch presided over a meeting of the Saxon state ministry that approved another major suffrage reform. It went in quite another direction from “Mehnert's Law,” though not in the opposite direction. Two days later the government's official gazette announced that the three-class suffrage of 1896 had had “the unintended effect of reducing the influence of those delegates elected by the third voting class on the selection of deputies, in a manner not in accordance with the principles of fairness.”<sup>90</sup> To begin the process of reform, the government would solicit the views of a “forum of experts,” due to convene in late August 1903. This stunning announcement turned Saxon politics on its ear.

“MAN PROPOSES . . .”

The furor caused by Metzsch's announcement was unprecedented. On 25 July 1903 a contributor to the Conservatives' *Vaterland* wrote that because the Saxon government was too timid to support revision of universal suffrage, it sought to pass “palliative measures” at home. “The Saxon government has no more urgent duty than to resist Social Democracy with energy and conviction. In the present case, unfortunately, the strength to do so—or perhaps also the will—has completely failed!”<sup>91</sup> An editorial in the same newspaper observed that “it takes some gall to demand of a parliamentary majority that it offer a hand for its own extermination.”<sup>92</sup> Reflecting left liberals' continuing antipathy toward Social Democracy, the *Zittauer Morgenblatt* agreed. Could the same majority parties that had passed the three-class suffrage in 1896 be expected to embrace another reform? “Are they now supposed to do in their own child and conceive a new one?”<sup>93</sup>

Social Democrats were unsure how best to react. Some wanted to revive the Suffrage League from 1896. SPD leaders in Leipzig thought this would ensure that the “wave of red ballots” cast in Saxony in the Reichstag election of June 1903 would flood into the Landtag as well. Others suggested that such a league embroiled socialists in exactly the kind of cooperation with oppositional bourgeois parties that the Dresden party congress would condemn two months later. They argued that a broader assault on Saxony's repressive police measures, tariffs, high

<sup>90</sup> *DZ*, 12.7.03; Diersch, “Entwicklung,” 216; cf. Gough, 8.7.03, PRO, FO 30/313, paraphrasing Metzsch's speech “last week” in Pirna: “a part of the population, led astray by agitators, had voted [in the RT election] in a manner which seemed to threaten all public institutions. One must, however, not lose courage, but take appropriate action in the future.” Cf. Dönhoff, 2.7.03, 19.9.03; acting Pr. envoy Wedel to Pr. FO, 15.7.03, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 6.

<sup>91</sup> *Vaterl*, 25.7.03.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *Vaterl*, 2.8.03.

<sup>93</sup> *Zittauer Morgenblatt*, 16.7.03, cited in LWRK, 105.

taxes, and low wages should remain the principal means of agitation, having succeeded so well in the Reichstag elections. This was the SPD's message during the Saxon Landtag election campaign in October 1903. But low turnout showed that it was already less compelling than in June.<sup>94</sup>

Metzsch claimed that his government's initiative of 12 July was *not* a consequence of the Reichstag elections barely a month earlier. This was a half-truth.<sup>95</sup> The timing of Metzsch's "conversion" was important. It became a bone of contention between Metzsch and the Conservatives, for three reasons.

First, whereas the Conservatives continued to believe that the Landtag suffrage was an essential bulwark against the socialist threat, the government in July 1903 claimed that it had *always* regarded the 1896 three-class suffrage as imperfect: it was not immutable. Although Metzsch had provided few hints that he was contemplating such a dramatic reversal of policy before July 1903, he recognized the need for reform before that date. Retrospectively, in recounting his first audience with King Georg after his ascension to the throne in June 1902, Metzsch provided an explanation for the government's change of heart:<sup>96</sup>

After [I] told him that statistics gathered under the present suffrage indicated that 80 percent of voters have no influence on the choice of deputies and are therefore unrepresented in the Landtag—which contravenes principles of fairness—also that among this 80 percent are found not only Social Democrats but also many clergy, teachers, lower and middle-ranking officials, etc., who are embittered because of this disadvantage; and finally, that as a result of these circumstances, the Reichstag has been made into a forum for discussing the domestic political affairs of Saxony, which properly belong only in the Landtag—the king agreed that the government should proceed with electoral reform.

In making a similar argument to King Georg in April 1903, Metzsch conceded that "a large part of [Saxony's] working class will elect no other representative" than a Social Democrat "and will not recognize the members of other parties as their representative." He added that "a change in this unhappy situation can only be hoped for *from within*." By this Metzsch did not mean to endorse the idea that Social Democracy would transform itself from a revolutionary to a reformist party. Rather, he drew upon evidence from beyond Germany's borders to suggest that workers could be induced to participate in the "positive work" of governance without giving in to purely "*social democratic*" demands. Certainly, restrictive measures could not yet be dispensed with; however, "the cooperation of Social Democrats might perhaps also contribute to the overcoming of Social Democracy itself."<sup>97</sup> The conviction with which Metzsch presented his proposal to King Georg

<sup>94</sup> In 5 LT WKe, turnout in Class III was under 20 percent; in 7 it was under 30 percent. Again the SPD failed to win a seat.

<sup>95</sup> Most important MdI memoranda and other documents (1903–4) are in SHStAD, MdI 5454; the first item is Metzsch's *aide-mémoire* from his meeting with the king in April 1903.

<sup>96</sup> Dönhoff, 19.9.03, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 6. Cf. RWA, 169; Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 80–4; LWRK, 91.

<sup>97</sup> Metzsch's draft *Denkschrift* (April 1903), SHStAD, MdI 5454; cf. LWRK, 99.

can be gauged by the effort he expended to convince his fellow ministers to go along. Finance Minister Conrad Rüger was Metzsch's chief opponent. Close to the Conservatives and hated by the National Liberals, he wrote that Social Democracy belonged in the monarchical state—or “every conceivable form of state”—“as little as an atheist does in a religious one.”<sup>98</sup>

The second reason it is important to date Metzsch's change of heart is that Mehnert charged the government with a gross error of judgment for not declaring its intentions before the Reichstag vote. The timing of reform made it appear that the SPD victory in June 1903 had been instrumental in initiating change. This alone signified for Mehnert a setback for the principle of authority as a premise of good governance and statesmanlike resolve. Mehnert also believed that the outcome of the election would have been much more favorable if the Saxon electorate had known beforehand that a revision of the Landtag suffrage was already being prepared in government circles. Both Metzsch and Chancellor Bülow were uncertain whether Mehnert's reasoning held water.

The third point of conflict between Mehnert and Metzsch was their common wish to be seen as the first to concede the need for suffrage reform. Metzsch was deliberate in refusing to inform Mehnert about the government's plans until just a few days before the announcement of 12 July, fearing that Mehnert would “steal his thunder.”<sup>99</sup> He thereby illustrated his determination to undermine the Conservatives' dominant position in the Landtag, in order, as he put it, to address the “galling unfairness” of the Landtag suffrage. But then Metzsch surprised the Prussian envoy Dönhoff by telling him that he intended to resign at the end of the upcoming Landtag session. The current domestic situation in Saxony evoked what Metzsch referred to as “deep disgust.” He had wearied of doing battle with a man, Mehnert, who was “demagogically inclined,” who had the “dominant Conservative Party ‘completely in his pocket,’” whose tactics were “shrewd and ruthless,” and who followed “the dictates of his personal vanity.” If these remarks ever made their way back to Mehnert, he would have smelled blood. Either way, in the coming months, Metzsch looked and acted like wounded prey. Dönhoff picked up this scent right away. He predicted that Mehnert would emerge victorious from this “power struggle” because Metzsch was “soft-hearted [and] very sensitive.” He took things too much to heart. His “conciliatory, genial, and tactful manner” had made him popular with some Landtag deputies; but as government leader—someone who could go toe to toe with the Social Democrats—Metzsch was not up to the task.<sup>100</sup>

The new Bavarian envoy agreed. This was Count Eduard von Montgelas, who delivered perceptive reports from Dresden from 1903 to 1916. He reported that although Mehnert did not always see eye to eye with Saxon aristocrats in the upper chamber, he was the “unrestricted master” of the lower house, where he exploited his influence “ruthlessly.” Mehnert had populated the house with his own “creatures.” Many functionaries of the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association were his “electoral agents.” Mehnert had “free access to all ministerial offices.” And he

<sup>98</sup> SHStAD, MdI 5454; Cf. acting Pr. envoy Wedel to Pr. FO, 15.7.03, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Dönhoff, 2.7.03, cited previously.

<sup>100</sup> Dönhoff, 19.9.03, cited previously.



demanded to be consulted on every important government measure—"otherwise he brings all government proposals to ruin." Montgelas's prediction was unequivocal. Because Metzsch had kept the Conservative leader out of the loop before he announced his suffrage plan, Mehnert "revenged himself with the categorical statement 'nothing will come of this reform.' And that sealed its fate in advance."<sup>101</sup>

In this test of wills, the National Liberals were caught in the middle. Their reasoning ran parallel to that of the Saxon government. The technocrats who were busy drawing up suffrage reform proposals in the Saxon interior ministry believed that the representation of economic interests belonged in any blueprint for Saxony's future electoral system. More precisely, they agreed that the interests of Saxon trade, commerce, and industry, like residents of its larger cities, deserved more political influence. National Liberals were beginning to recognize that political power and economic power devolved jointly toward those who could mount effective lobbies at the locus of decision-making in the state.

In the half-decade between the Reichstag elections of 1898 and 1903, Saxon National Liberals had become less enamored of the Kartell. Hesitantly, they began to question the political status quo, seeking to shake off their dependence on the Conservatives and transform their party into a serious contender for power in the Landtag. Early in 1902, a handful of Saxon businessmen had recruited Gustav Stresemann—the later National Liberal leader and Weimar statesman—to form the Association of Saxon Industrialists (*Verband Sächsischer Industrieller* or VSI) to press their economic demands. Within two years, Stresemann and the 4,000 businessmen organized in his new lobby group exercised direct influence over the left (and younger) wing of the Saxon National Liberal Party.<sup>102</sup> They tried to convince their party leaders that a new system of selecting members to both houses of parliament was the *conditio sine qua non* for industry's future prosperity. They also argued that a ruthlessly anti-labor and anti-reform policy was no longer viable in the "red kingdom." The economic and the political ends of Stresemann's association could not be neatly separated. The VSI's claim that it was apolitical rang hollow. As one scholar has noted, Stresemann did not have the convenient term "lobbyist" in his vocabulary, but he described the political function of his association accurately: "Every group organizes and approaches the state for aid," wrote Stresemann, "acting on the principle of Saint Simon's *mot*, 'Move over to make room for me.'"<sup>103</sup>

Immediately after the Reichstag elections of 1903, National Liberal newspapers began to echo the sentiments of Hans Delbrück. In his *Preussische Jahrbücher* Delbrück wrote that the re-entry of Social Democrats into the Saxon Landtag would provide crucial "relief" in future Reichstag elections.<sup>104</sup> In a general assembly

<sup>101</sup> Montgelas, 23.2.04 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962; on the Cons. LT caucus meeting of 12.8.03 see Mehnert to Rüger, 14.8.03; SHStAD, Mdl 5454.

<sup>102</sup> Dönhoff, 1.7.05, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 48, Bd. 20; Warren, *Kingdom*, 36ff., 52ff., and passim. On Stresemann's Saxon career, the new biography by Pohl, *Stresemann*, is essential reading, as are Pohl's earlier essays.

<sup>103</sup> "Ote-toi, que je m'y mette." Stresemann (1911) cited in Warren, *Kingdom*, 38.

<sup>104</sup> *PrJbb* 113, no. 3 (1903), 374.

of Saxon National Liberals in early September 1903, party leaders accepted an anti-Kartell platform. It included demands for a redistribution of rural and urban Landtag seats and a new suffrage based on plural voting (whereby certain privileged voters would be given extra ballots). During the 1903 Landtag election campaign, one observer noted "a turning-away of liberals of all shades from the Conservatives": they were attacking Conservative candidates in Dresden and Leipzig with "special vehemence."<sup>105</sup> In those autumn elections, the National Liberals won two seats from the Conservatives. The counter-attack was not long in coming. On opening day of the new Landtag session in November 1903, the Conservatives excluded liberal deputies from all five standing committees of the lower house.

Metzsch had meanwhile come to believe that suffrage reform was possible in the near future "without sacrificing the Landtag to the Social Democratic Party."<sup>106</sup> He had traveled to Berlin during the summer, conducting "long conferences" with Bülow about a planned reform. Everyone knew Metzsch would not and could not proceed with suffrage reform without the chancellor's blessing. The outrage expressed in July by the "parties of order"—that Metzsch was contemplating any reform at all—had slowly died down, as did public discussion of the Crown Princess Affair. And the Social Democrats' party congress in September allegedly induced many SPD voters to regret their decision in June. The time seemed right to debate Metzsch's suffrage reform seriously.

Not so fast, replied the Conservatives. The forum of "experts" did not convene to discuss the reform until after the Landtag campaign was completed in October 1903. The seventeen delegates had been chosen as strategically as possible by Metzsch. Mehnert's supporters could not be excluded, however. The participants included the leading lights of the "parties of order" from both houses of parliament, the mayors of big cities, chairmen of the most important chambers of trade and commerce, two representatives of Dresden's and Chemnitz's municipal assemblies, and Metzsch's predecessor as interior minister, Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz.<sup>107</sup> By the time the forum actually convened in late October, the bitter election campaign and rumors about Metzsch's impending resignation had already darkened the prospects for success.<sup>108</sup> Metzsch *had* offered to resign. But the king persuaded him to stay on, at least until the end of the current Landtag session. Both King Georg and Metzsch regarded the forum of experts—and the suffrage reform that would eventually emerge from it—as a "commandment of political conscientiousness."<sup>109</sup> Finance Minister Rüger held the opposite view. He warned of the

<sup>105</sup> Dönhoff, 19/26.9.03, 2/17/21/23/30.10.03, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 6; Vélcs, 17.11.03, HHStAV, PAV/52.

<sup>106</sup> For this and the following, see acting Austrian envoy Count von Lederer to Aus. FO, 29.7.03, Vélcs, 22.9.03, 6/31.10.03; HHStAV, PAV/52.

<sup>107</sup> Dönhoff, 30.10.03, cited previously; forum participants listed in SHStAD, Mdl 5454.

<sup>108</sup> Allegedly the Saxon envoy in Berlin (Hohenthal) would replace Metzsch, while the Conservative mayor of Dresden, Otto Beutler, would replace Finance Minister Rüger.

<sup>109</sup> "*Gebot der politischen Gewissenhaftigkeit.*" Vélcs, 9.11.03, HHStAV, PAV/52; cf. Metzsch to Rumpelt, 15.8.03, SHStAD, Mdl 5454. For the following account of the meeting of "experts," see the "Niederschrift" (41 MS pp.) in SHStAD Mdl 5463, with Rumpelt's "principal worries"; summary in Diersch, "Entwicklung," 218.

consequences of appearing to give in to the “party of revolution.” To do so now by taking an earnest interest in Landtag suffrage reform would create a barrier to what Rüger (and Mehnert) considered a far more important goal: “revision of the completely senseless Reichstag suffrage.” “With universal suffrage,” wrote Rüger, “the German Reich is heading to its ruin.”<sup>110</sup> This apocalyptic vision of a democratic Germany was not the idle daydream of a political renegade. Rüger remained Saxony’s finance minister until 1910 and succeeded Metzsch as *de jure* head of its state ministry in 1906.

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A *Denkschrift* is a working draft, a white paper, or more literally a think-piece. The government pre-circulated a *Denkschrift* among the “experts” who convened on 26 October 1903, but it found no support. All participants were worried lest their own party find itself disadvantaged under a new voting law. The contradictory views expressed by the participants offered no consensus, except that each one included “cautionary measures” to handcuff Social Democrats. Metzsch and his new suffrage advisor, Dr. Anselm Rumpelt, had anticipated this reaction.<sup>111</sup> For that reason, Metzsch began the meeting by pointing to the elephant in the room: “Does one want to take account of the desire in wide circles of the politically reliable populace for a revision of the suffrage, even at the cost of some Social Democrats entering the chamber?”<sup>112</sup> The wording of Metzsch’s preamble made it clear that he accepted the possibility that “some” Social Democrats would win election under his proposed reform. (Privately, Metzsch believed that twelve to eighteen Social Democrats “could only be of use to the second chamber.”)<sup>113</sup> However, not even this question elicited agreement. The president of the upper chamber, Count Richard von Könneritz, declared that not a single Social Democrat was acceptable in the Landtag. Others seconded Könneritz’s opposition by declaring that they could foresee “genuine” workers as deputies in the lower house, but not Social Democrats. Still others declared that it was both constitutionally and morally unacceptable for Social Democrats to swear allegiance to the Saxon king knowing that they had no intention to respect their oath. The moments when Social Democrats had taken their oath of allegiance in previous Landtag sessions, Mehnert declared, were among the “very worst of his life.” If only with their silence, other participants showed that they sympathized with the government. Yet, because the members of this forum did not agree *whether* Social Democrats should re-enter the Landtag, there was no hope of agreement on *how* they might do so.

Metzsch was infuriated by all this. He cited the “mind-boggling fact” that the deputies currently sitting in the Landtag had actually been chosen by less than 20 percent of eligible voters. (This was because the delegates elected in the first and

<sup>110</sup> Rüger to Metzsch, 29.6.03, SHStAD, MdI 5454.

<sup>111</sup> *Geheimer Regierungs-Rat* Dr. jur. Rumpelt served as AHM in Glauchau (1891–3) and Chemnitz (1893–8), and as KHM in Dresden (1906–9). He was the Kartell candidate who had taken an untimely vacation abroad, and lost, in the Reichstag campaign of 1903. In 1903–05 he was Metzsch’s suffrage expert in the MdI.

<sup>112</sup> “Niederschrift,” 6.

<sup>113</sup> Montgelas, 6.2.04 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962.

second voting classes outvoted those in the third class under the indirect three-class voting system.) Given that more than 80 percent of the electorate was unrepresented in the chamber, Metzsch complained that the Conservatives were duty-bound to redress a situation they had created themselves: they “could not draw back in fear from supporting the government in the suffrage reform project, even at the cost of sacrificing their own privileged position.”<sup>114</sup> A week later, after the forum of “experts” had provided no roadmap to reform, Metzsch again made clear who bore the blame. “The government, to the best of its ability, came to the aid of the Conservative-agrarian Landtag majority in 1896 in creating the aggressive law to turn back the socialists in the [Saxon] parliament and to prevent the revolutionaries from gaining ascendancy.” That majority was now “all the more obliged” to “show the way that will lead out of the abnormal situation prevailing today.”

By turns, Metzsch tried to be philosophical—and conspiratorial. “Suffrage reform might require years—possibly many years—of hanging in the wind,” Metzsch felt. He consoled himself with the thought that, particularly in Saxony, where party politics were so dissonant, “*ein gut Ding takes a long time.*” Even the Bavarians, he noted, had needed more than three decades to reform their own Landtag suffrage.<sup>115</sup> But Metzsch was not willing to wait for things to fall into place on their own. He and Rumpelt tried to exploit hints from leading members of the Conservative caucus—hints that they disapproved of Mehnert’s dogmatic resistance. One of these was Gottfried Opitz-Treuen, a representative of industrial interests in the Saxon Conservative State Association. Opitz was also Mehnert’s right-hand man in parliament. However, according to the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, he was also without peer as a socialist-hater.<sup>116</sup> Metzsch misjudged the man. The second possible ally was the mayor of Dresden, Otto Beutler. Beutler met with Rumpelt a number of times.<sup>117</sup> Private correspondence with Opitz and Beutler led nowhere. Mehnert was determined to exert “dictatorial influence” on matters of state in a way that reflected an “addiction that borders on sickness.” He intended to press “his campaign against the government with undiminished energy.”<sup>118</sup>

Metzsch and Rumpelt also tried to induce the National Liberal leader Otto Schill, a Leipzig lawyer, to participate in the work of reform. Again they failed.<sup>119</sup> Metzsch was genuinely surprised by the resistance he found in liberal circles. One must ask why he imagined that Saxon liberals would welcome a reform that did away with “the excesses of a plutocratic voting system.” Saxon liberals made clear that suffrage reform had to favor the bourgeoisie and the most “independent” men within it. They would oppose any suffrage that allotted “special representation” to the richest and poorest classes or to occupational estates “which mainly fight among

<sup>114</sup> Vélics, 1.11.03, HHStAV, PAV/52, reporting that Conservatives opposed the government’s plan because they enjoyed “the position of *beati possidentes* that the previous voting law had created.”

<sup>115</sup> Vélics, 10.1.04, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>116</sup> *SAZ*, 3.2.04, cited in LWRK, 119.

<sup>117</sup> Rumpelt to Metzsch, 10.8.03, SHStAD, Mdl 5454.

<sup>118</sup> Opitz to Metzsch, 27.7.03, SHStAD, Mdl 5454; Montgelas, 11.1.04 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962; LWRK, 109.

<sup>119</sup> Rumpelt to Metzsch and Rumpelt to Schill (copy), both 1.8.03; [Alfred von] Nostitz-Wallwitz (Berlin) to Metzsch (copy), 2.8.03, and other correspondence in SHStAD, Mdl 5454.

themselves egoistically.”<sup>120</sup> After the forum of “experts” met, the liberals also complicated Metzsch’s task by introducing two proposals to reform the upper chamber of the Landtag.<sup>121</sup> They sought stronger representation of trade, business, and industry in the Saxon upper house. The National Liberal caucus rallied behind this demand and sharpened it. Not only should these economic sectors be given equal representation with agriculture, but more influence in the upper chamber should also be given to practitioners of law and health care, education, and the technical sciences. The number of cities represented in the upper chamber should also be increased. Previously, Stresemann’s Association of Saxon Industrialists had petitioned the interior ministry to redraw the boundaries of Landtag constituencies to reflect the shift of population (and tax revenues) from rural to urban areas.<sup>122</sup> As we will see, these demands of 1903 would reappear with relentless consistency whenever liberals discussed suffrage reform in the future. From autumn 1903 to autumn 1918, they constituted core elements of Saxon liberalism’s vision of a modern, “fair” parliamentary system. But over the same fifteen years, Saxon Conservatives were never forced to concede them.

Mehnert’s Conservatives replied to liberal calls for reform of the upper chamber by asserting that reform in both chambers had to be linked. They knew that the upper house would not legislate a major reform of its own composition. Nor would it approve a meaningful reform of the suffrage for the lower house. The Conservatives’ strategy was sound.<sup>123</sup> In the face of this resistance, the government simply published its *Denkschrift* in slightly revised form on 31 December 1903.<sup>124</sup> Mehnert immediately labeled it “unacceptable.”<sup>125</sup> The Bavarian envoy described it as “actually a good and interesting piece of work.” But most political commentators regarded the *Denkschrift* as “completely hopeless”<sup>126</sup>—dead on arrival.

#### “... GOD DISPOSES”

In a preamble to the government’s published *Denkschrift*, and in defense of his proposals in the Landtag in early February 1904, Metzsch reiterated his view that the three-class suffrage law of 1896 had had unanticipated, undesirable consequences. The most compelling arguments for reform, he claimed, included the need to address recent changes in Saxony’s tax structure, the unfair distribution of rural and urban seats, the devaluation of votes cast in the third voting class, and the invidious system of voting first for delegates, then for Landtag candidates (indirect voting). The *Denkschrift* addressed various proposals for reform that had already been put forward.

<sup>120</sup> Nostitz-Wallwitz, 2.8.03 (copy), cited previously. Not all LLs or NLs agreed with this viewpoint.

<sup>121</sup> *LT Akten* 1903/04, II.K., Berichte, Antrag Nr. 21 (15.12.03), Antrag Nr. 26 (18.12.03).

<sup>122</sup> VSI to MdI, 25.8.03, SHStAD, MdI 5454.

<sup>123</sup> Dönhoff, 21.12.03, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 6.

<sup>124</sup> *LT Akten* 1903/04, II.K., Dekret Nr. 24 (2.1.04), for the following, esp. the *Promemoria*.

<sup>125</sup> Dönhoff, 10.1.04, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 6; cf. Dönhoff, 8/11/17/31.1.04, *ibid.*; Vélics, 10.1.04, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>126</sup> Montgelas, 11.1.04 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962.

It noted that virtually none of these had recommended either the preservation of the old suffrage or the introduction of public (i.e., non-secret) balloting.

Exactly as Metzsch's former suffrage expert, Bruno Merz, had done in late 1895, the *Denkschrift* drafted by Metzsch and Rumpelt in late 1903 devoted remarkable attention to all the suffrage regimes it considered unviable or unacceptable. The government categorically rejected universal, equal suffrage, because it would surrender the lower house to Social Democracy. But neither did it favor a suffrage wherein the principle of universality was mitigated by a low tax threshold for enfranchisement. A low threshold would not prevent the entry of Social Democrats into parliament. However, a high one would exclude many Saxons who were currently enfranchised—possibly including a large proportion of the *Mittelstand*. Similar doubts were expressed about raising the voting age from twenty-five to thirty. Mandatory voting was rejected on two grounds: the bureaucracy necessary to enforce it would be unwieldy, and if the government punished all citizens who failed to vote, it would drive many supporters of the state into the arms of the SPD. Proportional representation was rejected with the argument that it served only to augment the negative influence of “party interests” in parliament. So was the selection of deputies exclusively through local councils, in part because municipalities allegedly still retained a “non-partisan” style of politics and in part because this would retain the undesirable system of two-tier balloting. The same arguments were used against a system whereby all Landtag deputies would be elected on the basis of occupational estates. A similar system had led to difficulties for local elections in Chemnitz, and the government argued that it would be impossible to divide a much larger population fairly or logically into occupational estates. Lastly, the *Denkschrift* rejected a system of plural voting whereby certain voters would receive extra ballots on the basis of education, military service, ownership of property, age, and other criteria. Referring to academic studies and to Belgium's plural suffrage, the *Denkschrift* noted that the provision of only one or two extra votes would not have the desired effect of preventing socialists from dominating the Landtag. Providing a large number of extra votes would—like a high tax threshold—render the electoral influence of the lower classes “illusory.”

How, then, did Metzsch's government intend to eliminate the worst features of the 1896 suffrage and yet avoid the pitfalls inherent in these alternatives? It proposed a hybrid electoral system. Forty-eight deputies would be elected through direct three-class voting while another thirty-five deputies would be elected by voting according to occupational estates. This would increase the present size of the Landtag by one seat, to eighty-three. For the election of the forty-eight deputies through class-based elections, the kingdom would be divided into sixteen constituencies for each of the three voting divisions, eliminating the former distinction between urban and rural constituencies. Division I would include all males over twenty-five who paid direct taxes of at least 300 Marks annually or who had completed their secondary education. Division II would include voters who paid at least thirty-eight Marks and less than 300 Marks in annual taxes or who were entitled to one-year voluntary service in the army. Division III would include all other adult males as long as they paid some state taxes.

The estate-bound election of thirty-five deputies foresaw the election of three groups of deputies: (A) fifteen representatives of agriculture, (B) ten representatives of trade and industry, and (C) ten representatives of small business and crafts.<sup>127</sup> Any male who was eligible to elect members of the Saxon Agricultural Council could vote in category A. Any male entitled to vote for members of a chamber of trade could vote in category B. Any male who belonged to a guild or had at least one employee in his business could vote in category C. In the first election under such a hybrid suffrage, the entire Landtag would stand for election at once. Subsequently, one-third of deputies would be elected every two years in rotation (as in the past). Otherwise the government's proposal retained the secret ballot, the requirement of an absolute majority on the main ballot and a relative majority on the run-off ballot, and all existing requirements for the right to stand as a candidate.

The proposals included in the *Denkschrift* of December 1903 bore so little resemblance to the suffrage reform eventually enacted in 1909 that the ensuing parliamentary battle can be summarized quickly.<sup>128</sup> The left-liberal *Dresdner Zeitung* was not untypical in calling this reform "the weakest and worst concoction that the government could possibly have proposed." The writing was on the wall as soon as parliamentary debate of the government's *Denkschrift* began, as the Austrian envoy reported to Vienna. "Hardly has the Saxon Landtag joined the ranks of the German Reich's individual parliaments that are dealing with the difficult problem of devising a timely suffrage reform, and already this question is threatening to become an apple of discord not only among the parties but also between the two chambers of the legislature."<sup>129</sup> A few Landtag deputies were ready to support the government's proposal in a spirit of "cool *Realpolitik*." But the parties themselves, quite apart from their tactical calculations, were sticking to their "maximal suffrage programs," producing a "chaos of opinions." This envoy concluded that the adage *Quot capita tot sensus*—"There are as many opinions as there are heads"—applied to Saxony's Landtag.<sup>130</sup>

No member of the Radical Party (*Freisinn*) had been among the "experts" chosen to debate the issue behind closed doors. The party's *Zittauer Morgenzeitung* was therefore all the more ready to belittle National Liberals who did nothing to defend liberal principles. These "weather-vane politicians," one of its contributors predicted, would suffer shipwreck "in the suffrage storm if the government does not quickly signal the direction of the wind—according to which they can whirl around."<sup>131</sup> The Social Democrats were more caustic still. The government's proposed reform was a "worthless patchwork" and a "blow . . . in the honorable face of the worker."<sup>132</sup>

<sup>127</sup> *Kleinhandel, Handwerk, Kleingewerb.*

<sup>128</sup> *LTMitt* 1903/04, II.K., 1:549–609 (3.2.04), 2:1658–703 (28.4.04); cf. annotated drafts of the *Denkschrift* and other materials in SHStAD, Mdl 5461–5465; overviews in Diersch, "Entwicklung," 220–42, and LWRK, 118–27. Dönhoff, 8/11/17/31.1.04, 5.2.04, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 6; Dönhoff, 29.4.04, 21.5.04, *ibid.*, Bd. 7. For statistical studies requested during the committee's deliberations, see SHStAD, Mdl 5447, 5463.

<sup>129</sup> Vélics, 11.2.04, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>130</sup> Vélics, 11.2.04, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>131</sup> *Zittauer Morgenzeitung*, 26.7.03, cited in LWRK, 110.

<sup>132</sup> *SAZ*, 7.1.04; *LVZ*, 6/8/9.1.04; see LWRK, 120–3 for some of the following.

Protest meetings were held in many Saxon cities in the second half of January 1904. Though some of them attracted healthy crowds of 300–400 listeners, only the party faithful attended. A “people’s protest movement” worthy of the name could not be commanded “from above.” Less than a year after the SPD’s “three-million” victory in June 1903, an undeniable lethargy had crept back into the party’s ranks.

In the Landtag, the Conservative onslaught on the government’s *Denkschrift* was led by the Conservative Gottfried Opitz on 3 February 1904. The debate lasted almost seven hours. Opitz complained that the full renewal of the Landtag in each election promised only to heat up, not cool down, passions aroused by “demagogues” and “professionals” in the age of mass politics. In addition to the Social Democrats who were expected to win all sixteen constituencies allocated to the third voting class, Conservatives believed that more socialists would be elected either through the occupational elections or in the second voting class: there, Opitz claimed, the *Mittelstand* would not be able to withstand SPD “terrorism.” The National Liberals agreed.<sup>133</sup> They estimated that the government’s proposal would result in socialists winning twenty-five seats, almost one-third of the total, in the new Landtag. Eventually Opitz let down his guard and conceded that the Conservatives would not support a plan whereby even one Social Democrat would likely win election to the Landtag.<sup>134</sup> Neither the National Liberals nor the Conservatives asked the government whether it had made the same calculations itself. In any case, the National Liberals pushed hard for plural voting, whereby men of property, wealth, or status would receive extra votes. Referring often to the plural suffrage that prevailed in Belgium, they believed that the elites of property and education would be favored under such a system. They also hoped that King Georg would do more to help the cause of suffrage reform than simply keep Metzsch in office: the king’s personal initiative was necessary to restore the sympathy “between the dynasty and the people” and overcome the self-interest of the Conservative Party. But the Saxon king remained passive.

From lengthy discussions in committee—described by Metzsch as a comedy—consensus emerged on only two points. An election system based on occupational estates would never win majority approval in the Landtag. The government had considered an occupational suffrage because it had been introduced for municipal elections in Chemnitz in 1898 and had served the purpose of preventing a Social Democratic “flood” of that chamber. But in the Landtag Metzsch found almost no support for the idea. Instead, both the National Liberal minority and the Conservative majority favored plural voting. The problem with plural voting, of course, was that each political group wanted a different ranking of criteria according to which extra ballots would be allocated. Some wanted preferment to be calculated on the basis of taxes paid to the state. Others favored such criteria as age, education, ownership of property, military duty (with distinctions between ranks), other

<sup>133</sup> The left liberals preferred either the universal suffrage or a return to the suffrage of 1868 with a higher tax threshold, and an antisemitic deputy spoke in favor of mandatory voting.

<sup>134</sup> Protocols of the LT’s legislative committee in SHStAD, Mdl 5447; report in *LT Akten* 1903/04, II.K., Bericht Nr. 232 (21.4.04); SHStAD, Mdl 5463.



“practical experience,” family situation (single, married, widower, number of children), number of employees, and service in public or voluntary office. To complicate matters further, whereas some foresaw as many as seven supplementary ballots, others insisted on designing the new system on the basis of full, half, one-third, and one-quarter votes. It is not difficult to imagine the fruitless debates to which such proposals gave rise.

When the government’s *Denkschrift* was rejected by the Landtag on 28 April 1904, Mehnert crowed that he had carried the day (Metzsch was “not in a rosy mood”).<sup>135</sup> The Agrarian League celebrated “the burial of the stillborn child.”<sup>136</sup> Social Democrats did not help their own cause when their national press debated which of the two suffrage reform “failures” (1896 and 1904) was worse for their party. In the October 1904 issue of the revisionist *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Edmund Fischer (who represented 1: Zittau in the Landtag) raised eyebrows and the scorn of *Vorwärts* editor Georg Gradnauer (5: Dresden-Old City). Fischer wrote that his party, instead of “quietly accepting” the setbacks of 1896 and 1904, should adopt a more positive attitude toward parliamentarism. If it did so, it would be possible to rally the people in support of “*bourgeois* liberties” and “*bourgeois* democracy.”<sup>137</sup> Fischer had previously outlined similarly revisionist views to Clara Zetkin: as she later reported to Karl Kautsky, “my every nerve trembled, and trembles still when I think of that.”<sup>138</sup> In *Die Neue Zeit*, Gradnauer attacked Fischer’s “tactic of parliamentary gentleness.” He did so partly because the alleged passivity of Saxon Social Democrats had attracted attention from the Italian socialist Filippo Turati and, at the Amsterdam congress of the Second International, from the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès. Nevertheless, Gradnauer endorsed *attentisme*—the policy of waiting—as appropriate even for Saxony, the “testing ground of reaction.”<sup>139</sup> Through their efforts and victories in the Reichstag elections of 1898 and 1903, wrote Gradnauer, the masses had learned that suffrage robbery could be avenged “without letting their skulls get smashed in.”<sup>140</sup>

The Conservatives’ victory of April 1904 was Pyrrhic. The suffrage issue was not dead. Just before the session ended, twenty-three Conservatives with ties to industry defected from their caucus leaders on a bill that proposed a new manufacturing tax (it had been crafted in the Landtag committee chaired by Mehnert). The bill was defeated and Stresemann’s business lobby declared its first victory over Saxon agriculture.<sup>141</sup> Before the suffrage reform issue was interred temporarily, a resolution based on the National Liberal minority report passed by a vote of 43 to 30: it asked the government to submit new proposals for consideration in the next session. The deputies also charged the government—and for this historians can be

<sup>135</sup> Dönhoff, 29.4.04, cited previously. Mehnert had initially wanted to prevent the LT from even debating the government’s proposal: King Georg intervened to save his state ministry such an embarrassment; Montgelas, 19.12.05 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963.

<sup>136</sup> DTZ, 29.4.04; cf. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *BTbl*, *LNN*, all 30.4.04.

<sup>137</sup> Fischer, “Widerstand” (original emphases); Gradnauer, “Probe.”

<sup>138</sup> Zetkin to Kautsky, 4.3.00, cited in LWRK, 125.

<sup>139</sup> “*Probierland der Reaktion*.” <sup>140</sup> Gradnauer, “Probe,” 116, 118.

<sup>141</sup> DTZ, 30.3.04; *LNN*, 1.4.04; Warren, *Kingdom*, 55.

thankful—with the task of gathering more comprehensive and reliable statistics to permit informed debate on future proposals.

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Because Saxon Landtag sessions convened only every second autumn, there was a forced hiatus in discussion of suffrage reform between May 1904 and November 1905. By mid-1905, National Liberal businessmen were more alienated than ever from the Conservatives.<sup>142</sup> The previous autumn, the Saxon NLP had announced that its electoral Kartell with the Conservatives was dead. Now they claimed that the Conservatives should be fought at the polls with the same methods used in the struggle against Social Democracy. The Conservatives' actual importance in the kingdom stood in such "glaring disparity" with their two-thirds majority in the Landtag that it "[had] led to the *de facto* elimination of the other parties in the legislation and administration of the land."<sup>143</sup> The campaign leading to the Landtag elections of 2 October 1905 was among the bitterest in recent memory—not because of voter excitement but due to press wars between the two strongest parties. Instead of the normal one or two Kartell candidates, this time three, four, and sometimes more candidates contested the twenty-nine constituencies in play.

Paul Mehnert did what he could to head off this liberal charge. Earlier in the year he had met with the chairman of the Association of Saxon Industrialists, Franz Hoffmann. He tried to convince him that the Saxon Conservatives were "friendly to industry." Mehnert also offered bare-faced bribes. Hoffmann turned down a "guaranteed Landtag seat" because he was loathe to accept it "from the hands of the Conservative leader." He also refused Mehnert's offer to support the inclusion of "4–5 members from industrial circles" in the Landtag's upper chamber: to this Hoffmann declared that representatives of industry should occupy "at least half" the seats there.<sup>144</sup> Where bribes failed, Mehnert turned to secret machinations: he infiltrated a Conservative mole into the VSI's leadership group.<sup>145</sup>

Conflicts seething within National Liberal ranks confused the situation. The head of the party, Otto Schill, represented the old guard, which had its base in Leipzig. It continued to cooperate with Mehnert's Conservatives. More and more National Liberals, though, were beginning to sympathize with Stresemann's group in Dresden, who claimed they could attract urban workers to the party and shake off the Conservative yoke. A motion to move the party's headquarters from Leipzig to Dresden reflected this development: the party was considered to be "*national liberal*" in western Saxony and "*more national liberal* in the east."<sup>146</sup> The motion was barely defeated.

<sup>142</sup> For this and the following, see Dönhoff, 29.10.04, 25.11.04, 13.3.05, 23.5.05, 3.6.05, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 7; Vélcs, 29.5.05, 26.6.05, 12.7.05, HHStAV, PAV/53; Warren, *Kingdom*, 57f.

<sup>143</sup> Vélcs, 26.6.05, cited previously.

<sup>144</sup> Bavarian Consul Reichel (Dresden) memo to Montgelas, 7.3.05, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963.

<sup>145</sup> Dönhoff, 13.3.05, cited previously. After the 1907 elections, the VSI could claim that 28 Landtag deputies—mainly National Liberals—were pledged to its program. Pohl, "Sachsen," 206.

<sup>146</sup> Montgelas, 2.3.04 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 962.

During the Landtag campaign of 1905, three astute observers—Carl von Dönhoff, Paul Mehnert, and the editor of the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, Hans Block—all believed that the National Liberals were a long way from being the defenders of political principle to which they laid claim. The Prussian Dönhoff wrote (disapprovingly) that Stresemann and the Young Liberals had brought to a halt a fundamental convergence of interests between National Liberals and Conservatives in Saxony over the previous twenty years. They had woolly-headed ideas.<sup>147</sup> Even the Association of Saxon Industrialists did not seem to be following a consistent line. On the one hand, it was willing to endorse candidates from any party if they pledged to support business interests. On the other hand, it published a black list of deputies who were allegedly unwilling to represent the “legitimate interests” of industry in the Landtag: at the top of this list were Mehnert and Opitz.<sup>148</sup> Neither policy impressed Dönhoff.<sup>149</sup>

The same doubts were voiced a few weeks before the autumn 1905 elections by the Social Democrat Hans Block, writing in *Die Neue Zeit*.<sup>150</sup> Block claimed that the National Liberals’ “pompously-announced challenge” to the Conservatives had so far amounted to nothing. Constituency-level associations had been unable to mount independent campaigns. The “murderous slaughter of Saxon agrarianism,” Block wrote sarcastically, was nothing more than a “gentle scuffle” for a few Landtag seats. In this contest, liberal principles played no part, only the threatened interests of Saxon industry. Block predicted that economic self-interest and the continued fear of socialism would eventually bring National Liberals back to Mehnert’s Kartell, even though purely political demands and the issue of suffrage reform might detour them for a time. This prediction was in line with Mehnert’s assessment of the situation. He believed that even the Young National Liberals in the Landtag would soon see the value of the Kartell—at least once they discovered that their independence served the interests of left liberals and Social Democrats and once they learned that “positive work” in parliament was possible only in cooperation with the Conservatives.

These assessments of National Liberal weakness were correct. The Landtag elections of October 1905 produced a rout of Young National Liberal candidates.<sup>151</sup> The NLP’s caucus increased by only one member. A single SPD deputy, Hermann Goldstein, re-entered the Landtag as representative for the 37th rural district—a mining region in the Erzgebirge so impoverished that it was described as a “black” corner in the red kingdom.<sup>152</sup> Government leader Metzsch was pleased: Stresemann’s troublesome group had fallen short of its goal; the Conservative caucus had failed to renew its two-thirds majority; Landtag debates might become

<sup>147</sup> Dönhoff, 13.3.05, also 23.5.05, 3.6.05, 19.9.05, 3/4/26.10.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 7.

<sup>148</sup> VSI election manifesto, etc., cited in *Vaterl.*, 5.8.05.

<sup>149</sup> Dönhoff, 13.3.05, 3.6.05, and Vélcs, 26.6.05, all cited previously.

<sup>150</sup> Block, “Wiedergeburt,” 697. Cf. Block, “Landtagswahlen.”

<sup>151</sup> Acting Aus. envoy Lederer to Aus. FO, 4.10.05, HHStAV, PAV/53; Bav. consul Reichel to Bav. FO (draft), 7.10.05, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963; Dönhoff, 28.9.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 20; Dönhoff, 19.9.05, 3/4/26.10.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 7.

<sup>152</sup> *SAZ* (n.d.) cited in Block, “Landtagswahlen,” 97f.

lively again; and the election of one Social Democrat might reduce public pressure for suffrage reform. Nevertheless, Metzsch again told a foreign envoy that he intended to resign in the summer of 1906.<sup>153</sup> Metzsch's decision might have been prompted in part by the decision of the SPD's Jena congress in September 1905 to endorse the mass strike as a weapon against “suffrage robbery.”<sup>154</sup>

Just as the new Landtag session opened in November 1905, Saxon deputies were suddenly forced to turn one eye to Russia and the brewing storm there. Following Russia's defeat by Japan and the outbreak of revolutionary violence, the Tsar's October Manifesto promised a four-class suffrage. Would this find an echo in Central Europe? Massive suffrage demonstrations in Vienna pointed in that direction.

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After Social Democrats increased the size of their Landtag caucus in 1891, 1893, and 1895, the “parties of order” had responded with a draconian revision of the Saxon suffrage in 1896. “Mehner's Law” was a reaction to an “emergency” situation. That it was an *over*-reaction became clear in the three Landtag elections of 1897, 1899, and 1901, when the last socialist was driven from Dresden's parliament. The triumph of “reaction” in Saxony was complete. But it was also short-lived. It was reversed in less than two years—or so it seemed. The Landtag session of 1903/04 opened with a frontal attack on Conservative privilege. The assault was not launched by socialists. Instead it originated with the Saxon government, with the approval of the Saxon king. This situation produced an odd bird—a hybrid suffrage system—that laid an egg. The reform proposed by Metzsch and his suffrage expert Rumpelt satisfied no one.

No clearer evidence can be found for the close reciprocal relationship between elections and suffrage reform. Yet these pages have also highlighted the close relationship between Saxon politics and Reich politics. In the mid-1890s, Saxons had shown the way to resolve a perceived impasse at the national level. They used suffrage reform in Saxony as an ersatz for the coup d'état that was left untried in Berlin. In 1903, it was a *national* election that produced a sensation at the subnational level. Chancellor Bülow laid an egg too.

As we will see, the Reichstag elections of June 1903 convinced many anti-socialists that neither the Reich nor the Saxon government could secure their nation's unity and security in the face of “revolutionary” dangers. Within months a nationalist opposition was taking shape. In no sense, then, was Red Saxony stillborn in June 1903. It produced an unhappy infant that was defiant but weak. The next stage of development came in the winters of 1905/06 and 1906/07. On the first occasion, violence drove government leader Metzsch to the brink of despair. At that point, plans for a more viable suffrage began to mature—more viable, at least, than the government's hybrid scheme of 1903. On the second occasion, anti-socialist groups in the Reich were able to beat back the socialist tide. But in neither case was crisis followed by political calm. Any claim to political unity

<sup>153</sup> Vélics, 12.7.05, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>154</sup> See SPD, *Protokoll... Parteitag... 1905*, 285–343.

within the German *Bürgertum* after the Reichstag elections of 1907 disappeared when Bülow left office under a cloud in July 1909.

These developments emerged from the dramatic events of 1903. Social Democracy's conquest of all but one Saxon constituency galvanized the German Right and helped prepare it for future battles. At the time, this outcome seemed scarcely imaginable: the defeat suffered by Saxony's *Ordnungsparteien* had immense symbolic impact. But Paul Mehnert did not lose faith that a hard-headed defense of the established political order was still possible. True, social democratization could not be stopped. Neither could Social Democracy—at least when the electoral playing field was level. Both premises, however, presented the Right with an opportunity to hit back hard.

## 9

# Deflecting Democracy

José Ortega y Gasset, in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932), wrote that “The health of democracies . . . depends on a wretched technical detail—*electoral procedure*. All the rest is secondary.”

Electoral procedure. Suffrage. Franchise. The right to vote. *Das Wahlrecht*. These terms are barely adequate to describe all the rules and regulations that determine who can participate in elections and how their votes are counted. Considering not “pure” democracy but the interwoven processes of democratization helps bring many of those rules into historical context. Some of the starting points when nations embarked on the journey toward democracy are relatively uncontentious: 1688 in England, 1789 in France, 1867/71 in Germany. It is less easy to follow the twists and turns by which even one nation’s electorate grows, shrinks, or becomes subdivided. More difficult still is the exercise of zooming in to sub-national peculiarities—for instance by considering democratization in fifty United States or twenty-five German ones—or zooming out to consider democratization from comparative and transnational perspectives. A bird’s-eye view of democracy? The *longue durée* of democratization? Both seem fanciful.

Political scientists, sociologists, and other students of comparative politics have written a great deal about democracy, electoral systems, voters and parties, and political activism.<sup>1</sup> Historians of German elections have put empirical meat on the theoretical bones of party systems and voter behavior. This chapter continues this enterprise by suggesting that after 1903, the discourse of political reform in Germany no longer turned on the issue of scrutinizing election rules to ensure a fair and free vote, as it had before the turn of the century. Talk of electoral fairness flowed in another direction.

To avoid overreach, this chapter focuses on thresholds to democracy that, when they were crossed, became important to people living in a given polity—and to historians today. Germans looked outward and inward for lessons about how democratization could be hastened by tearing down barriers to democracy but also impeded by setting new ones. Those lessons can be conceived as political spillovers, some of them sudden, from the processes of social change that were slow and impossible to resist. Our focus falls on the ways such political spillovers were anticipated, ignored, misunderstood, forgotten, and reinterpreted with hindsight.

<sup>1</sup> As demonstrated by two thick *Oxford Handbooks*, entitled *Comparative Politics* and *Political Sociology*. Here one thinks of Stein Rokkan, Ralf Dahrendorf, M. Rainer Lepsius, Karl Rohe, and Peter Steinbach.

# “THE DECENT OPINION OF MANKIND”

It is curious that the Saxon Socialists who have found seats in the German Reichstag should be excluded from the Saxon Landtag.

—Minute to a report from the British envoy in Dresden, 1907<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Jefferson prayed our America will be, forever, a bastion of democracy based on a national spirit of civic respect, a national debate leading to informed consent of the governed, resulting in policies so good and wise they would appeal to what he called the decent opinion of mankind. The common sense of this is clear.

—Brent Budowsky, *The Huffington Post*, 2011<sup>3</sup>

The Saxon government demonstrated its sensitivity to international models of electoral fairness when it cited Aristotle and Montesquieu, the British House of Commons and the Austrian Reichsrat, in its suffrage reform proposal of 31 December 1903. To develop this idea of a transnational conversation—an exchange of views about the suffrage of the future—this chapter considers pertinent aspects of democratization in France, Britain, and the USA. Germans seldom mentioned these models. By contrast, they referred often to parliamentary debates and the street protests that accompanied suffrage reforms in Austria, Vienna, and Belgium. Eventually Sweden and Tsarist Russia were added to this list.

An intra-German conversation also gained resonance at exactly the time Saxons got serious about suffrage reform at home. The dangers and opportunities of broadening the electorate in Saxony were measured against yardsticks provided by suffrage reforms in Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, and Hessen; in Hamburg, Lübeck, Frankfurt am Main, and Braunschweig; and in the Saxon cities of Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden. To understand how these measurements were calibrated, we can usefully apply a distinction two scholars suggested in their analysis of Prussian suffrage reform.<sup>4</sup> They divided arguments for and against reform into two categories, which they call “because”-arguments and “in order to”-arguments. “Because”-arguments point to principles and precedents from which a new norm can be deduced. For example, because all men are naturally equal, they should all be given the same voting rights. “In order to”-arguments begin with an accepted norm and use it as a means to achieve certain aims. Those aims lie in the future, but the norm that will help realize them is already established. For example, an equal suffrage makes sense in order to raise the willingness of people to fight for their country.

It is often difficult to determine which of these two kinds of arguments were deployed during German suffrage reform movements after 1903. Individuals who

<sup>2</sup> Minute to Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to British FO, 1.10.07, PRO, FO 371/262, BFO-CP, reel 16/33969. Findlay had the important, difficult task of serving as envoy to Norway during the First World War and was knighted in 1916.

<sup>3</sup> The Blog, *Huffington Post* (online), 25 May 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhards/Rössel, *Interessen*, esp. 26–7.

proposed or actually drafted new suffrage laws—constitutional scholars, ministerial counselors, politicians, statesmen—frequently conflated the norms on which their suffrage plans depended and the aims they were meant to serve. In Saxony, “in order to”-arguments were used most frequently in reference to Social Democracy and its hold over the working classes. Thus suffrage reform was necessary in order to quell popular unrest, keep the Social Democrats from gaining a parliamentary majority, and avoid revolution. “Because”-arguments were used too, but they were articulated less clearly.

In this regard, Saxony was not unique. Consider the remark of a foreign visitor to Germany looking back from the perspective of 1916. He was struck by the pervasiveness of anti-socialist feeling among large sections of the German bourgeoisie: “the Rhenish shopkeeper, the Black Forest clockmaker, the Pomeranian peasant farmer—all have shuddered alike at the growing power and influence of Social Democracy and regarded as holy almost any means that would tend to defeat its ultimate success.”<sup>5</sup> Suffrage reform made some Germans draw back from the option of exterminating Social Democracy *because* they respected the rule of law and endorsed universal manhood suffrage for national elections. But the threat of revolution prepared other Germans to manipulate Landtag and municipal suffrages *in order to* disadvantage the working classes at the polls and prevent Social Democracy from winning a majority in parliament. The suffrage proposals examined in this chapter suggest that it is unwise, and perhaps impossible, to distinguish categorically between these two groups.

#### A TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATION

Historians of Britain, France, and the United States have expressed dismay that these countries are deemed to have been democracies before 1918. In Great Britain, the First, Second, and Third Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884/85 did not usher in democracy. Only the “Fourth” Reform Act of 1918 came close to doing so: it expanded the electorate by about 200 percent and included women for the first time.<sup>6</sup> German reformers almost never cited Britain’s first three Reform Acts—perhaps because they actually looked quite familiar. They accorded different electoral weight to boroughs and counties; they established progressively lower tax thresholds for enfranchisement; and they reflected a prevailing view (at least before 1872) that the secret ballot was “furtive” and “un-English.”<sup>7</sup> The Third Reform Act of 1884/85 left about one-third of adult males without the vote, many because they changed jobs too frequently to meet the twelve-month residency requirement.<sup>8</sup> A British handbook suggested that even after the Third Reform Act, the suffrage was “so replete with technicalities, complications, and anomalies that every obstacle is put in the way of getting on, and every facility exists for getting struck

<sup>5</sup> Robert Herndon Fife, Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 180, cited in Ziegler, *Prelude*, 14f.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew/McKibbin/Kay, “Franchise Factor.” <sup>7</sup> Whitfield, *Extension*, 206–7.

<sup>8</sup> Blewett, 27, estimates that 40 percent of adult males were still not on the electoral register in 1911.



off, the [electoral] register.”<sup>9</sup> In both Britain and Germany, suffrage laws were characterized by apparent adherence to the principles of liberalism, undercut by practical considerations in their operation, and beholden to old and inconsistent practices.

Plural voting in Britain continued as well. If an elector held property or paid rent in more than one constituency, or if he wished to vote in a constituency where he held a business or had matriculated from a university, it was permissible to cast more than one ballot. The immense loss of life in the First World War led reformers in Britain to embrace “full” democracy only hesitantly. Revolutionary changes were to be avoided, just as “unpatriotic” electors were not rewarded. Although the female vote was introduced, restrictions were intended to avoid having a majority of women among the electorate. And conscientious objectors were disenfranchised for five years starting in 1921. Measured against British yardsticks, then, the German path of democratization did not look particularly special at the time.

In Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other former British colonies, battles over suffrage reform had different origins and took different forms. Whereas in Europe the question of who could vote was usually a matter of class, property, and gender, in the colonies questions tended to focus on whether aliens should be allowed to vote and what level of racial discrimination was acceptable. Britain had been shown twice—in 1776 by the thirteen American colonies and then in 1837 by rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada—that colonists were quick to take umbrage when they were excluded from the political process. The British had little appetite to repeat such upheavals. Hence the widening of the suffrage often moved at a faster pace in the colonies than it did in the mother country.

Nevertheless, in these countries and in the United States, race provided the basis for excluding those who allegedly lacked national “feelings” or “aspirations.” Scholars have chronicled the long, dismal history of such exclusion in the United States. They have also noted the tremendous variety of barriers to voting. Those barriers were raised and lowered not mainly at the national level but by individual states, provinces, and territories. As constitutional amendments were weaved together at different tiers of government, property qualifications played a less important role than they did in Europe in determining the size of the electorate. No new state admitted to the Union after 1790 had a property requirement for voting.

Early American objections to universal suffrage were forceful enough to deserve the echo they did not find in Germany. The constitutional convention held in New York in 1821, for example, was split on the question of universal suffrage. Some delegates argued that handing decisions about a fledgling economy over to the hands of the poor and uneducated was to invite chaos. “The tendency of universal suffrage is to jeopardize the rights of property and the principles of liberty.”<sup>10</sup> One delegate declared that the vote should be given only to those with “a stake in society,” but he was overruled. At the same time that property qualifications were being eliminated, tax thresholds for enfranchisement remained in place or were

<sup>9</sup> S. Buxton, *A Handbook to Political Questions of the Day*, 9th ed. (1892), cited in Blewett, “Franchise,” 28, also 27f. for the following observation.

<sup>10</sup> Vines/Glick, “Impact.”

raised. The rights of African Americans (and Chinese and Native Americans) were rolled back in the Reconstruction era, usually under the veil of defending states' rights. Germans after 1900 did not cite examples from America when they debated how local circumstances collided with an alleged national consensus. Nor did they use the United States as a mirror to illustrate how the tide of democratization could be reversed by new exclusionary laws. But they could easily have done so.

Democracy came to France in stages, too. Germans noted that upheaval, violence, and sudden constitutional changes accompanied French democratization in ways that Germany must avoid. The French Revolution brought terror. The Second Republic actually shrank the French electorate by 30 percent when its suffrage of May 1850 introduced a residency requirement of three years. Napoleon III's Second Empire seemed to demonstrate the undesirability of having both parliamentary chambers actually undertake real legislative work. French "democracy" was also seen to support the ambitions of "bonapartist" rulers. Even the Third Republic, with a *Senat* and a *Chambre des Députés*, offered useful examples that Germans wanted to avoid.<sup>11</sup> Hybrid electoral systems included the representation of municipal bodies, multi-member constituencies, and the frequent revision of voting laws to their own advantage by Monarchists, Radicals, and Republicans. By the twentieth century some anti-democrats in Germany blamed both universal suffrage and the acceptance of socialists into French cabinets for the growing threats of "revolutionary [and] antimilitaristic propaganda" there.<sup>12</sup>

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Suffrage reforms in Belgium and Austria drew much more attention in early twentieth-century Germany. The electoral law for Belgium's National Congress, dating from 1830, had become a matter of public debate by the 1880s: it was seen to be out of date and unfair to workers.<sup>13</sup> The Belgian Workers' Party, founded in 1885, represented workers who were vulnerable to exploitation by employers—so vulnerable that Marx called Belgium "the hell of the proletariat."<sup>14</sup> By 1890 the party's leaders had begun to plan for a general strike to force the government to adopt a new voting law. A suffrage demonstration in Brussels in August 1890 brought about 75,000 men and women into the streets. But reform stalled in parliament for almost three years. More violent protests erupted in the spring of 1893. They were led by miners, supported by 2,000 demonstrators who rioted in Ghent. "Brussels is under siege," proclaimed *Le Peuple*. As Rosa Luxemburg observed at the time, the Belgian general strike taught the Second International "to speak Belgian."

A new Belgian suffrage was hastily drafted and passed in April 1893. To balance the socialist "hordes," a plural suffrage was introduced. Men over the age of thirty-four were given a second vote.<sup>15</sup> Men who were professionals, held a degree from an

<sup>11</sup> Sick, "Parlament," 104–20; Hewitson, *Identity*; Hewitson, "Kaiserreich."

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Below, *Wahlrecht*, esp. 73–84.

<sup>13</sup> For much of the following see Witte et al., *History*, and Polasky, "Revolution."

<sup>14</sup> This and the following citations from Polasky, "Revolution," 449–53.

<sup>15</sup> As long as they were heads of households and paid property taxes.

institution of higher education, or owned property valued at more than 2,000 francs were given a third vote. Thus 853,000 electors had only one vote, 293,000 had two votes, and 223,000 had three.<sup>16</sup> Although voters with two or three votes comprised only two-fifths of the Belgian electorate, their combined votes (1,240,000) outweighed the 850,000 electors with only a single vote.<sup>17</sup> The size of the electorate increased ten-fold: from almost 138,000 (among a population of almost 6.3 million in 1893) to over 1.3 million.<sup>18</sup> Working-class leaders called off the general strike, but their followers were enraged by the allocation of plural votes.

In 1894, the new Belgian suffrage was tested for the first time. Germans saw a cautionary tale in its outcome. Even the Belgian socialist leader Emile Vandervelde conceded that the election campaign of 1894 was “unbridled, crazy,” though in the same breath he praised his own party’s bravery and heroism. No one anticipated that the Belgian socialists would win more than one or two seats. But the Belgian Workers’ Party won twenty-eight seats—a sensation that caught Europeans’ eye. Liberals won only twenty seats, and both groups were overshadowed by the Catholic Party, which won 104 seats. New wrinkles were added in 1899, but liberals discovered that proportional representation favored the Catholic Party even further. Vandervelde remarked that the liberals “had to be dragged to universal suffrage, almost like condemned men being led to the scaffold.”<sup>19</sup>

Neither social nor political peace was easily won in Belgium. Strikes broke out again in 1902 and 1905, followed by bombings, large demonstrations, and more deaths. A ten-day general strike in April 1913, which included 400,000 workers by the end of the first week, brought assurances that the suffrage would be reformed again. Yet Vandervelde acknowledged that the campaign to achieve universal suffrage was both “more than and less than a revolution.” If Belgium had not been distracted by German invaders in August 1914, universal manhood suffrage might have been enacted that year. It arrived instead in 1919. The new electorate now represented almost 28 percent of the population.<sup>20</sup> It included women who had been imprisoned by the Germans, war widows who had not remarried, and mothers of sons killed in the war. Other Belgian women had to wait until 1948 for enfranchisement.

Suffrage reforms for the Austrian Reichsrat and Vienna’s city parliament have produced a small mountain of historical scholarship.<sup>21</sup> Tension and deadlock in the Reichsrat was a perpetual problem because of conflicts among Polish, Czech, Cisleithian (Germanic), and other subjects of the empire. (The *Ausgleich* of 1867 included a separate parliament for the Hungarian territories.) As Czech nationalism grew more powerful, Austrian leaders hoped to rely on the *Mittelstand* as a counterweight. Conservative politicians claimed that the “lower, politically

<sup>16</sup> Goethem, *Belgium*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Witte et al., *Political History*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Hand et al., *Systems*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Emile Vandervelde to Karl Kautsky, 30.4.02, cited in Polasky, “Revolution,” 458; for the following citation (1902), *ibid.*, 463.

<sup>20</sup> 2,102,710 electors in a population of 7,577,027; Hand et al., *Systems*, 1f.

<sup>21</sup> See inter alia Jenks, *Reform*; Adlgasser, “Kontinuität.” On Vienna see Seliger/Ucakar, *Wahlrecht*, esp. 52–5.

uncorrupted classes" should receive electoral preferment.<sup>22</sup> These people were "sound" because they were devoted to the Habsburg monarchy, not to irredentist leaders. They received preferment in 1882 when the tax threshold for enfranchisement was lowered to five florins. Emperor Franz Josef hoped that by embracing suffrage reform, a broader, more "Austrian" electorate would not pursue narrow ethnic nationalism. By the mid-1890s, he and his prime ministers concluded they had miscalculated. Czechs and Poles from the middle classes were more supportive of their own leaders' nationalist aspirations. A further widening of the suffrage in 1897 tacked a fifth *curia* on to the other four: it elected seventy-two of 425 members of the Reichsrat. This fifth *curia* included virtually all males over the age of twenty-four with a six-month residency requirement: it numbered 610,140 men.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the members of the other four *curiae* were given a second vote in the fifth *curia*. As a result, about 40 percent of Austrian males cast two votes.

Suffrage reform in Austria was enacted under the influence of popular agitation by the Austrian Social Democratic Party, founded in 1888, and the Christian Social Party, led by the mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger. The latter targeted *Mittelstand* and non-socialist workers, much as Adolf Stöcker's Christian Social Party did in Germany. After percolating for many years—heated up by Vienna's own "suffrage robbery" of March 1900<sup>24</sup>—popular agitation boiled over. It sent Social Democrats into the streets of Vienna (and Dresden). The occasion was an eerie procession of 200,000 Social Democratic sympathizers who marched along Vienna's famous Ringstrasse, on 28 November 1905. Emperor Franz Josef and Karl Lueger reacted similarly to this challenge, albeit for different reasons. Lueger calculated that by embracing universal suffrage, his party had a chance "to beat the Social Democrats at their own game . . . —if not on the Ringstrasse, then in the polling place." The Habsburg emperor was eager to dispel the political baggage that had encumbered his government, his parliament—and his monarchy—for years. Saxony's King Friedrich August III was motivated by the same wish.

The socialists' procession of 28 November was a mock battle. It was repeated in Saxony, Hamburg, and other German states over the next two months. The march was preceded by weeks of negotiation among workers, the police, municipal authorities, and Social Democrats. Those negotiations helped ensure that no bloodshed occurred. However, the "power of the street" was not a sham.<sup>25</sup> In November 1905, conservative burghers in Austria proclaimed the imminent end of the world—the *Kladderadatsch*—if universal manhood suffrage were introduced. Socialist leaders warned that the Austrian proletariat would "learn to speak Russian" if reform was delayed. In Vienna the Jews were singled out with particular viciousness for their alleged role in promoting suffrage reform and supporting

<sup>22</sup> Emil Steinbach, a state minister under Count Eduard Taffe, cited in Simpson/Desmond, *Europe*, 315.

<sup>23</sup> Steenson, *Marx*, 176; Bartolini, *Mobilization*, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Boyer, *Culture*, 39–59 and 77f., for this and the following quotations; also Lehnert, *Institutionen*, chs. 7–8.

<sup>25</sup> Boyer, *Culture*, 75: "Everyone concerned knew exactly what was at stake and what roles were to be played. The theatre of the streets in Vienna also required rehearsals."

Social Democratic “revolutionaries.” Karl Lueger, no longer able to claim that he was “master of Vienna,” warned the Jews that Austrian riflemen might re-enact what Bloody Sunday had wrought in Russia: “It is not in our nature to kill and maim,” he declared; however, “if the Jews should threaten our *Vaterland*, then we will know no mercy.” Franz Josef was less dramatic, but in December 1906 he and his government took a huge gamble. They pushed universal male suffrage through the Reichsrat. At the same time they did away with the curial system of indirect voting and introduced the secret ballot.<sup>26</sup> Christian Socials and others tried to eviscerate the new suffrage by attaching some of the same elements of an “ideal” suffrage that were under discussion in Saxony. These included plural voting, an occupational suffrage, and other cautionary measures meant to prevent a Social Democratic landslide at the next election. Austrian ministers accepted the “remedy” sought by antisemites in both countries: mandatory voting. They also collaborated with Christian Socials in drawing constituency boundaries that disadvantaged Social Democrats.

The first and only test of the new Austrian suffrage took place in May 1907. Whereas the Social Democrats’ election machine proved its worth, contemporaries believed that Lueger’s Christian Socials, with the help of mandatory voting, successfully brought apathetic non-socialist voters to the polls and captured swing voters. The result confirmed that Vienna would still be dominated by two opposing camps. In Austria’s lower house, which sat from 1907 to 1918, other clerical parties gradually threw in their lot with Lueger’s Christian Socials, creating a new Imperial Party modeled on the socially-diverse German Center Party.

The Austrian government was pleased by this outcome, on two counts. The collision of Austria’s powerful political blocs had not undermined the legitimacy of the state, and the Social Democratic “threat” to state and society had been deflected. Austria no longer faced the danger that Social Democrats would “conquer” parliament or that they and their enemies would annihilate each other. It seemed more likely that the Imperial Party would hold the allegiance of peasants, *Mittelständler*, lower civil servants, non-socialist workers, and others who had drifted between the socialist and anti-socialist camps. For these reasons, from 1907 onward, Saxon parliamentarians and statesmen looked favorably upon the strategies deployed by anti-socialists in Austria, and they tried to match their success.

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In this transnational conversation, one of the most important themes was the relationship between liberalism and the privileges accorded to “expertise,” “capacities,” “credentials,” “intellect,” and “independence.” This theme was not new. References to an individual’s “capacity” owed a great deal to “the rise of professional society” and “the authority of experts” (to cite two books on the subject).<sup>27</sup> Liberals claimed that they had successfully dethroned property, birthright, and hierarchy, substituting preferment of education, expertise, and achievement (*Leistung*) as guarantees of competence. They believed unequal suffrages were not anachronistic; they were ultra-modern.

<sup>26</sup> Details in Jenks, *Reform*, passim; see also Boyer, *Culture*, 72–81.

<sup>27</sup> Perkin, *Rise*; Haskell, *Authority*.

The language of “capacity” and “expert knowledge” had been deployed liberally in the nineteenth century to close off discussions about democracy. Advocates of plural suffrages after 1900 would have agreed with an observation made in 1878 by Émile Boutmy, founder of the *École libre des sciences politiques*: “Privilege no longer exists; democracy will not recede. Forced to submit to the right of the greatest number, the classes which call themselves the upper classes can only retain their political hegemony by invoking the right of the most capable. It is necessary that behind the crumbling wall of tradition and their prerogatives, the democratic flood shall encounter a second rampart.” For Boutmy—and for Saxon liberals—that second rampart included “merits,” “superiorities,” and “capacities” that the modern state needed.<sup>28</sup> Conservatives bought in to this idea. In 1909, the conservative scholar Georg von Below wrote that the “democratic flood” could be held back by a plural suffrage.<sup>29</sup> Saxon Conservatives agreed.

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In the spring of 1914, Professor Friedrich Wilhelm von Rauchhaupt decided that Germans needed a new handbook to inform them about the variety of electoral laws in the Reich.<sup>30</sup> “A fresh wind of renewal,” he wrote, “has blown through the constitutional life of the individual German states since the beginning of this century.” Rauchhaupt cited a long list of suffrage reforms beginning with Braunschweig’s of 1899 and ending with those in the Thuringian states in 1912–13.<sup>31</sup> Clustered in the middle were reforms in Baden (1904), in Lübeck (1905), and then, in 1906, in Hamburg,<sup>32</sup> Württemberg, and Bavaria. “The development is not yet complete,” wrote Rauchhaupt. Both Mecklenburg grand duchies would “eventually have to pay their tribute to the spirit of the times.” To reinforce his point Rauchhaupt cited the program of the new *Reichswahlreform* association, which demanded that Germans living in the colonies should be included on voter lists in the metropole.

Rauchhaupt’s catalogue had one remarkable omission: Saxony’s suffrage reform of 1909.<sup>33</sup> No matter: “Electoral laws and regulations . . . and their comparative study,” he wrote, “have a special enchantment,” in part because they were the outcome of “political trials of strength” that depended on “what was said and what was not said.” Democratization, not democracy, was what really interested Rauchhaupt. The sheer number of “possible combinations and variations” among suffrage laws passed since 1900 was so “surprising” that “a certain standardization” might be commendable. However, Rauchhaupt distrusted remedies that promised an “ultimate cure.” Suffrage reform was in “perpetual motion.”

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Georg Meyer’s posthumous work *Das Parlamentarische Wahlrecht* (1901) was the authoritative statement of principles on parliamentary suffrages in the first decade

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Kahan, *Liberalism*, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Below, *Wahlrecht*, 160–3.

<sup>30</sup> Rauchhaupt, *Handbuch*, esp. III–IV.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Gerhardt, “Entwicklung,” for Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach.

<sup>32</sup> See Eckardt, *Privilegien*, and Wiegand, *Notabeln*, sec. IV.1–IV.2.4, on Hamburg.

<sup>33</sup> Tödter, “Klassenwahlrechte,” esp. 67–86, 94–119.

of the twentieth century. Meyer was a firm believer in unequal suffrages. But he argued that the Prussian three-class suffrage was indefensible in the modern age.<sup>34</sup> Meyer saw a plural suffrage as the least-bad option for Germany's federal states. Yet if it were introduced, it had to be steeply unequal. The educated and propertied classes, he wrote, represented such a small proportion of the electorate that giving them two or three extra votes would have little effect on election outcomes. A "*much greater increase*" in the number of extra votes given privileged voters would be necessary to ensure them "real influence."

Meyer also discussed the merits of proportional representation (PR). As early as the 1880s, German politicians and publicists had argued that PR offered the best weapon against the "rotten fermentation" of socialism.<sup>35</sup> However, in practice, proportional representation had more deficiencies than merits for Meyer—as it did for the National Liberal Party, which he represented in the Prussian Landtag and the Reichstag. According to Meyer, proportional representation broke the "bond of trust" between voters and their representative. It ignored local affinities. It did away with the useful notion of geographically-bounded constituencies. And it was too complicated. Though some German reformers took the opposite view, a majority agreed with Meyer's dismissive judgment.<sup>36</sup> Proportional representation offered no answer to one of Imperial Germany's most vexing questions: how to reform Prussia's notoriously unequal three-class suffrage?

#### ELEPHANT IN THE REICH

As Prussia's suffrage debate heated up after 1903—more gradually than Saxony's—reformers increasingly rallied behind a plural suffrage. Prussian Minister of the Interior Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg asked his advisor in suffrage questions, Government Counselor Dr. Meineke, to devise a thorough-going but "safe" revision to the three-class suffrage. For both men, the goal was to avoid Leftist demands for universal suffrage and Rightist demands for representation according to occupational estates.<sup>37</sup> Meineke's views coincided closely with those of the Prussian National Liberal Party, which had been clamoring since 1900 for a plural suffrage. Publicists like Hans Delbrück and Oskar Poensgen, who also fashioned themselves suffrage experts, supported this path of reform.

In 1906 the Prussian Landtag approved a minor reform of the three-class system. The National Liberals tried but failed to attach two provisions to the government's legislation. The first foresaw a plural suffrage, yielding a system in which an elector's eligibility was still based on his tax exposure but also took into account his age and education. The second called for the replacement of indirect voting by direct voting. Neither proposal succeeded, because a (modest) redistribution of urban and

<sup>34</sup> Meyer, *Wahlrecht*, 451. For the following, *ibid.*, 441–53 and 620–53, esp. 445 (original emphasis) and 627.

<sup>35</sup> Ziegler, *Prelude*, 18f.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Savigny, *Wahlrecht*, ch. X; Cahn, *Verhältniswahlssystem*, ch. 4.

<sup>37</sup> KDWR, 458–513, esp. 470. Cf. Röder, *Reichstagswahlrecht*; Leo, *Wahlrecht*.

rural constituencies was the National Liberals' chief demand, which they achieved. This "pragmatic stabilization" of the existing suffrage in 1906 satisfied almost no one.<sup>38</sup> Even members of Prussia's state ministry were divided on the question of whether some Social Democrats should enter a future Landtag. If they did, the ministers agreed they should have only a "decorative function." One conservative believed that a few "token Social Democrats" in the house would provide a "political safety valve."<sup>39</sup> This argument was used in Saxony to suggest that even under "Mehnert's Law" a few socialists should enter the Landtag. But it failed to convince steadfast enemies of Social Democracy.

Subsequent reform plans in Prussia took an unpredictable course. Developments were influenced by street demonstrations in Belgium and Austria and by suffrage reforms in other German states.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the division of the most populous constituencies in Prussia, which created ten new seats, five Social Democrats entered the Prussian Landtag in the elections of 1908. Some hardline anti-democrats did not consider this a "token" number at all—one pike in the carp-pond was too many.<sup>41</sup> But National Liberals in Prussia began to move away from Conservative obstruction and consider working with left liberals, even though Friedrich Naumann provoked a storm by proposing the Reichstag suffrage for the Prussian Landtag.

The National Liberals declared that the modest suffrage reform of 1906 was merely a "down payment" on a more far-reaching reform,<sup>42</sup> and they continued to advocate other reforms to the existing Prussian suffrage. In the spring of 1908, when the Saxon suffrage reform was entering its decisive phase, National Liberal Party leader Ernst Bassermann and his suffrage expert Paul Krause came out in favor of the direct, secret vote in Prussia. Another influential National Liberal, Eugen Schiffer, pointed to the crossroads his party and Prussia had reached by December 1909: "the politics of the Reich culminates in Prussia, that of Prussia in the suffrage question, that of the suffrage question in the secret ballot."<sup>43</sup>

Bethmann Hollweg's suffrage expert worked closely with civil servants in the Saxon ministry of the interior and the royal statistical office when he devised a new suffrage reform plan for Prussia. Between March and October 1907, Dr. Meineke compiled a *Denkschrift* that ran to 300 pages. He explored the merits and defects of the three-class and plural suffrages from both historical and theoretical perspectives. He also provided an array of statistics and draft legislation to underpin his proposal.<sup>44</sup> The details of Meineke's labors need not concern us here. His suffrage plan went on life-support when Bethmann Hollweg was replaced as Prussian minister of the interior in late 1907 by the arch-conservative Friedrich von Moltke. The new minister quickly replaced Meineke with his own more conservative

<sup>38</sup> Wulff, "Deutschkonservativen," ch. II/5; KDWR, 479–92; Rössel, *Mobilisierung*.

<sup>39</sup> Oktavio von Zedlitz-Neukirch (RfKP) cited in KDWR, 485–6.

<sup>40</sup> See Schuster, "Dreiklassenwahlrecht," 76–269.

<sup>41</sup> Montgelas, 27.10.05 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963.

<sup>42</sup> Nonn, "Populismus," 145. Cf. Bethmann Hollweg to Bülow, 22.3.07, cited in KDWR, 492, and for the following; also Gagel, *Wahlrechtsfrage*, ch. IV.

<sup>43</sup> Eugen Schiffer to Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, 19.12.09, cited in Nonn, "Populismus," 146.

<sup>44</sup> *Denkschrift* discussed in KDWR, 500–9.



"suffrage expert," Arthur von Falkenhayn. Where the reformist Meineke noted that his plural suffrage could withstand complaints from the left that it was "excessively plutocratic," the conservative Falkenhayn disagreed: it was "excessively democratic."<sup>45</sup>

As we will see in Chapter 13, the Prussian ministry's failed reform attempt of 1910 demonstrated the Prussian government's inability to stand up to obstruction from majority parties in the Landtag.<sup>46</sup> There are other similarities between Meineke's Prussian suffrage plan of 1907 and the Saxon government's reworked suffrage proposal announced in July 1907.<sup>47</sup> Both embodied a compromise: between liberal and conservative principles, and between the fundamental politicization of German society and the elitist politics of notables. It was on the basis of this double compromise that statesmen in Prussia and Saxony believed a plural suffrage could be built. In a long memorandum of March 1907, Bethmann Hollweg put this argument to Chancellor Bülow. "The idea that anyone who has a certain amount of property, who has sacrificed a great deal for his education, and who has left behind the years of imprudence may also exercise a claim to a higher voting right—this [idea] should appear so legitimate to general human understanding that it brings unto itself a certain popularity." Bethmann Hollweg in Prussia and the Saxon government agreed on other matters too: The three-class suffrage could not be defended in the long run. A wise statesman must not miss the right moment for reform. And a new suffrage plan could help Conservatives adapt to the "political mass market."

Dr. Meineke used statistics from the Prussian Landtag elections of 1903 and the Reichstag elections of 1907 to calculate how many Social Democrats would benefit from incorporating specific privileges into a new suffrage. This is exactly what his counterpart in Saxony did too. Meineke concluded in 1907 that the criterion of age would be insufficient "to strengthen the influence of the state-supporting parties in a tangible way—let alone a decisive one."<sup>48</sup> Therefore he argued that the Prussian suffrage must not only privilege older voters but also revert to the criteria of property and income to produce an acceptable outcome. The result was a plural suffrage that would have awarded electors between seven and twelve votes each. On this basis, Meineke calculated how many Prussian Landtag seats each of the parties would win under different conditions.<sup>49</sup> He concluded that only a plural suffrage provided a sufficiently "strong weapon of defense" against Social Democracy.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Cited *ibid.*, 510.

<sup>46</sup> On the failed 1910 bill see works by Wulff, Kühne, Rössel, Gerhards/Rössel, Warneken, and Lindenberger; also ch. 13 of this book.

<sup>47</sup> The latter is discussed in ch. 11.

<sup>48</sup> KDWR, 503.

<sup>49</sup> The table showed the actual number of seats currently held by each party; the likely division of seats if the Reichstag suffrage were used for Prussian Landtag elections (without redrawing constituency boundaries); and the result of using the plural suffrage. *Ibid.*, 508f.

<sup>50</sup> In 1907, no SPD deputy sat in the PAH. By adopting the RT suffrage, Meineke forecast that the PAH would hold thirty-one or, in a worst-case scenario, thirty-eight SPD MdLT. But with a plural suffrage, the SPD mandates would number only ten or, under unfavorable conditions, fourteen at most. Meineke calculated that the SPD would do even worse if PAH constituency boundaries were gerrymandered at the same time. But such manipulation would not be necessary to fulfill Bethmann's aim of forming a LT majority of Conservatives, Free Conservatives, and National Liberals.

Bethmann Hollweg's memorandum to Bülow made clear that suffrage reform was not a "wretched technical detail"—*pace* Ortega y Gasset—but a winning political strategy with far-reaching implications. Bethmann cited the Prussian reforms of 1808, 1848/49, and 1872 to underline the significance of a fourth turning point.<sup>51</sup>

The three-class system in its present form holds within itself the danger that the Conservatives will lose touch with the broad mass of the *Volk* . . . [Things are] different with the plural suffrage. Although there the vote of the little man also counts for little, at least it is not meaningless; it counts, and it thereby forces the classes with more substantial property to work together with the rest of the population and reach agreement with them. Thereby the gulf between the various classes is reduced and the foundation of the state fortified. Moreover, a Conservative Party that has been modernized, as is the case in England, . . . would signify a great benefit for the state and an inestimable gain for the Crown.<sup>52</sup>

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Suffrage reform in Prussia fell victim to Bethmann Hollweg's "politics of the diagonal" after he assumed the chancellorship in July 1909.<sup>53</sup> In the meantime, individuals continued to propose pie-in-the-sky suffrages they called "ideal electoral systems." Some of these argued for doing away with things they labeled anachronistic. One writer observed that political parties, as such, no longer belonged in the topsy-turvy world of modern politics: representatives of fringe groups like bimetallists, anti-vivisectionists, and temperance leagues "could be quite sensible in other respects; for everybody probably has one screw loose, and he who doubts that has two."<sup>54</sup> Others thought they saw patterns emerging from "politics in a new key," and sometimes they were right. In January 1906, British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey observed that there was "a widespread feeling of discontent in many of the German states with the system of 'indirect' elections, framed for the purpose of excluding a representation of the lower ('labouring') classes . . . The effect of the passing of a more liberal law in Bavaria will certainly be to stimulate the growing agitation in Prussia."<sup>55</sup>

Grey was correct that the sign of the times was to replace indirect with direct voting and public with secret voting; but few other generalizations hold water. In southern Germany, party alliances (often based on confession) determined the fate of Landtag suffrage reforms more often than in the north, where the "power of the street" (as in Hamburg, Lübeck, and Berlin) was stronger. In southern Germany, governments favored timely reform or tolerated party alliances that made them

<sup>51</sup> In 1872 the Rural Government Act (*Kreisordnung*) was passed over Conservative opposition.

<sup>52</sup> "Denkschrift über ein Mehrstimmenwahlrecht" (Nov. 1909) cited in KDWR, 500.

<sup>53</sup> Ch. 13 establishes November 1909 as a turning point in Prussian ministers' thinking about suffrage reform. Until then, Prussians saw the benefits of Saxony's plural suffrage legislated in January 1909. But Social Democrats unexpectedly won twenty-five seats in the Saxon LT elections of late October and early November 1909. Suddenly the plural suffrage became less attractive.

<sup>54</sup> Erwin Cuntz and H. Matzat, both 1907, cited in Ziegler, *Prelude*, 20f. Cf. Kantorowicz, "Demokratie"; Petermann, *Individualvertretung*.

<sup>55</sup> Grey minute, 20.1.06, on the report of the Br. envoy to Württemberg, Reginald Tower (Stuttgart), 14.1.06, PRO, FO 371, BFO-CP, reel 6, no. 2489. The following citation from Bebel is from Tower to British FO, 25.1.06, *ibid*.

inescapable. More resolute responses were the norm in the north, with Prussia being the obvious example. The future role of Social Democracy in German political life was another question posed in all suffrage reform debates but answered differently from state to state and among the “parties of order.” Would the SPD continue to grow? Would it moderate its policies? Would it enter into electoral or legislative alliances with non-socialist parties? Lastly, reformers made little headway with calls for universal manhood voting at the state level (and none when they demanded the vote for women). Advocates of hybrid systems attracted more criticism than support: “too complicated” and “impracticable” were the usual responses. And cries for direct voting and the secret ballot never silenced debates over plural voting, proportional representation, gerrymandered constituencies, run-off elections, tax thresholds, or residency requirements. A “modern” electoral system lay in the eye of the beholder.

In January 1906 August Bebel was less confident than Edward Grey that a spillover effect would compel Prussia to legislate the three-class suffrage out of existence. After the eldest son of Bavaria’s prince regent raised eyebrows by calling on Bavaria’s upper house to recognize the need for suffrage reform, Bebel told the Reichstag: “If a Prussian prince in the Prussian upper house spoke as Prince Ludwig of Bavaria has spoken in the Bavarian chamber, I think the Junkers would declare him fit for a lunatic asylum. (Much laughter). Were the German emperor to be chosen by popular vote from among the German princes, then I think Prince Ludwig of Bavaria would have every chance of becoming German emperor. (Continued applause and laughter).”

The point is not to ask whether Grey or Bebel saw the future more clearly. Both of them understood that different political traditions prevailed in northern and southern Germany and that social democratization could not be stopped.<sup>56</sup> Those insights, in turn, suggest why Saxony is a good laboratory for examining innovative suffrage proposals. Saxon prescriptions for “safe” suffrage reform reflected the kingdom’s geopolitical position between north and south. They also reflected the determination of bourgeois Germans to man the ramparts against democracy.

## SAXON MODELS

An extraordinary number of proposals, in part [arriving] directly, in part through the press, from corporative political bodies, associations, private persons (inside and outside Saxony) . . . What lively new interest!

—Privy Counselor Anselm Rumpelt, suffrage expert in the Saxon ministry of the interior, memorandum [August 1903]<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Useful sources on subnational suffrage reforms include Kritzer, “Wahlrechtsreform,” and Thränhardt, *Wahlen*, 116–19 (Bavaria); Menzinger, *Verfassungsrevision*, 141–73 (Württemberg); Ehrismann, *Liberalismus* (Baden), 516–22; and Niehuss, “Configurations”; Vogel/Nohlen/Schultze, *Wahlen*; Tödter, “Klassenwahlrechte” (for all).

<sup>57</sup> [Rumpelt] memorandum [for government leader and MdI Georg von Metzsch], n.d. [Aug. 1903], SHStAD, Mdl 5463.

One cannot have everything one wants—not only in practice, but even in theory.

—Isaiah Berlin (1994)<sup>58</sup>

Advocates and opponents of suffrage reform in Saxony drew on a flood of written proposals that ranged from academic studies to personal rants. Government leader Georg von Metzsch was both desperate and naïve in June 1902 when he encouraged “anyone who has an interest in doing so” to join the conversation about suffrage reform.<sup>59</sup> In early 1903 Metzsch thought the three-class suffrage of 1896 should be retained for a few more legislative periods to demonstrate its merits and weaknesses. The Social Democratic landslide in the Reichstag elections of June 1903 convinced him otherwise. Proposals for reform were already arriving at the Saxon interior ministry before the Reichstag voting was over. Metzsch’s suffrage expert, Privy Counselor Anselm Rumpelt, became almost giddy over the materials he now had to work with as he set about redrafting the government’s plan. He then listed the salient points raised in those proposals: “No sentiment *for* the retention of the present suffrage. *No* challenge to the secret ballot, general demand for *direct* elections.”<sup>60</sup>

That the government’s *Denkschrift* was interred by the Conservative Landtag majority in April 1904 in no way disproves Rumpelt’s and Metzsch’s conviction that public sentiment favored change. But as the next five years proved, it was not sufficient to cite popular interest or invoke international standards of electoral fairness to find a home-grown solution to Saxony’s political crisis. In Metzsch’s opinion, reformers should pay no heed to Social Democratic voices calling for reform. Others were not so sure. Germans were beginning to differentiate in new ways between groups lumped together at one end of the social spectrum—“revolutionaries” and “the mob”—with groups at the other end—“state-supporting citizens” and “right-thinking people.” The lines of conflict that distinguished these categories were becoming less obvious with each new election: *das Volk* was not voting as “right-thinking people” should. A number of Germans were also beginning to ask why women should be excluded from the political nation.<sup>61</sup>

#### “WHAT IS TO BE DONE?”

Many individuals who drafted proposals for Saxon suffrage reform were influential political actors on the local, regional, or national stage. The electoral systems they proposed, like the public discourse in parliament and the press, depended largely on how they answered two questions. First, should Social Democrats enter the Landtag at all, and if they did, could they be allocated a “fair” or “legitimate” number of seats? Second, which pressures for reform should be taken seriously? Did the calm deliberation of competing reform proposals in lobby groups or on the floor of the

<sup>58</sup> Berlin’s “short credo” reprinted in *New York Review of Books* 61, no. 16 (23 Oct. 2014): 37.

<sup>59</sup> *LTMitt* 1901/02, II.K., 2:1651 (4.6.02).

<sup>60</sup> Previously cited memorandum, [Aug. 1903], SHStAD, Mdl 5463 (original emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> Altmann-Gottheiner, “Parteien” (1910); Bock, “Frauenwahlrecht”; Clemens, *Kampf*; Rosenbusch, *Weg*.

## Reichstagsplenarfitzungsidylle

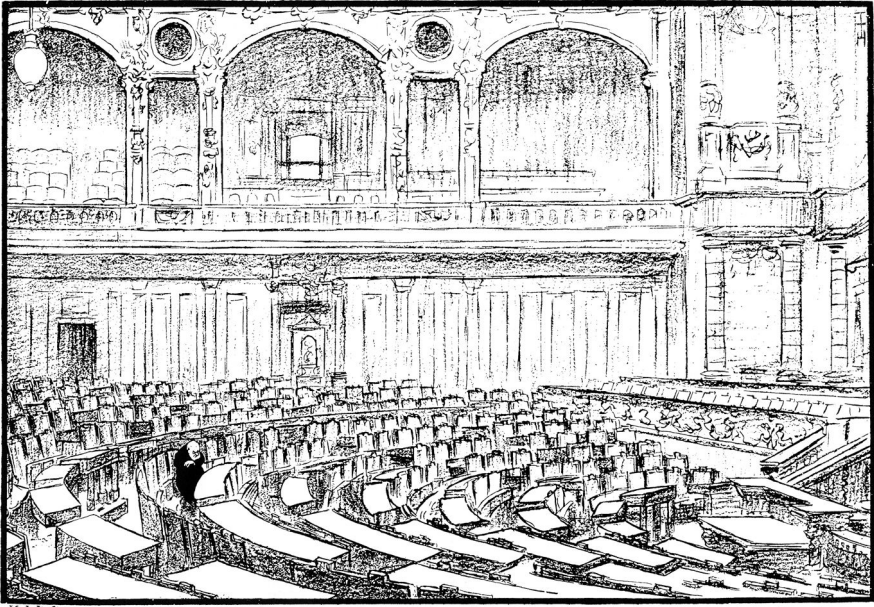


Figure 9.1. A Conservative's Idyllic Reichstag—Empty.

Source: Achim Zink, *Bilder aus dem alten Deutschen Reichstag 1867–1900* (Bonn, 1980), 33.

Landtag offer the best means of moving forward? Or was it important to listen to protests in the street?

On this latter point scholars disagree among themselves. Some give credit to lobby groups like the Association of Saxon Industrialists or the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association for deciding the fate of suffrage reform.<sup>62</sup> Others ascribe Saxon unrest to the dissatisfaction of consumers after 1900, citing successful SPD attacks on taxes, tariffs, and high food prices. Still others emphasize the impact of SPD street demonstrations in pushing reform forward. With only one member of their party sitting in the Landtag, Social Democrats had little hope that the Landtag could reform itself. (Figure 9.1 illustrates anti-democrats' preference for a pliant parliament without influence.) But irreconcilable or unpopular combinations of electoral systems provided no clear path forward for party politicians and state ministers. These contentious aspects of suffrage reform help explain why the Saxon experience can be considered unique and yet a bellwether for German developments.

Near the end of his draft for the government's suffrage reform *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903, Privy Counselor Rumpelt added a cautionary note. He cited an anti-democrat from outside Germany, Charles Benoist, who sympathized with the *Action française* and published *La crise de l'état moderne* in 1899. Benoist's

<sup>62</sup> See Pohl's writings, esp. "Emanzipationsprozeß"; Nonn, "Radicalism"; Lässig, "Terror"; LWRK, 137–96.

formula to redress the deficiencies of universal suffrage seemed to point in the direction Rumpelt and Metzsch wanted to follow. The modern state, Benoist had written, is “prey to the disease of inorganic universal suffrage, anarchic universal suffrage, cookie-cutter universal suffrage. This yields . . . legislation full of conflicts and *coups* [and] a government that can no longer govern . . . The solution to this problem? There is only one. The end of this crisis? Only one. The remedy to this disease? Only one: . . . to replace inorganic universal suffrage with organized universal suffrage, . . . not to reject the constituent parts as being of inferior quality—all must be used—but recast and put back together.”<sup>63</sup> By following Benoist’s prescription for reform, we saw in the previous chapter that Rumpelt and Metzsch produced only a muddle—a complicated hybrid system that satisfied no one. It was rejected by the Landtag in April 1904. Where next to turn?

Saxon reformers participated in transnational, national, and subnational conversations about suffrage reform—and about democracy itself.<sup>64</sup> Some of their models for reform were beguilingly simple; others were dauntingly complex.<sup>65</sup> Some were written by academic advisors to the government; others were unsolicited and amateurish; still others were drafted at “the green desk” of civil servants or were suggested by city mayors. Among the most interesting models were those that evolved over time, as their authors recalibrated their recommendations to new political circumstances.

Changing viewpoints about proportional representation are a case in point.<sup>66</sup> The gradual demise of the politics of notables played an important role here. Should seats be allotted to those at the top of a party list, who might be completely unknown to an individual voter? Or should the voter be given some chance to connect with his preferred candidate? Two of Germany’s leading constitutional experts wrote opposing opinions about the suitability of proportional representation for Saxony. They even traveled to Dresden to lobby for their preferred option. With Saxony as their laboratory, these academics wanted to make their mark in the realms of research, teaching, and service.

Professor Richard Siegfried of Königsberg, East Prussia, was a staunch advocate of proportional representation. In a series of articles and books published between 1898 and 1907, he advocated its introduction not only for Saxony and Sweden but also for Bavaria, Württemberg, and other middle-sized German states.<sup>67</sup> In 1906 he also proposed changes to the Prussian three-class suffrage.<sup>68</sup> Siegfried wrote to government leader Metzsch in January 1906 that he had been collecting newspaper clippings about Saxon suffrage reform for many years. He had already offered his

<sup>63</sup> Benoist, *Crise*, 28f.

<sup>64</sup> See esp. SHStAD, Mdl 5488, with clippings and reports from Budapest, Vienna, Copenhagen, and Sweden.

<sup>65</sup> See numerous brochures, etc., in SHStAD, Mdl 5485–6.

<sup>66</sup> Ziegler, *Prelude*, 9 and passim.

<sup>67</sup> Siegfried, “Proportionalwahl”; idem, “Organisation”; idem, “Entwurf eines Wahlgesetzes für das Königreich Bayern,” MS (n.d.), SHStAD, Mdl 5494; idem, *Proportionalwahl*. Blindness cut short Siegfried’s career in 1908–09.

<sup>68</sup> Siegfried, *Wahlkreise*; idem, *Benachteiligung*.

services the previous year.<sup>69</sup> Now he was willing to provide more advice. Soon a literature review of relevant works landed on Metzsch's desk in the interior ministry—or rather on the desk of his successor, Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen, who took office on 1 May 1906. Hohenthal chose a new “suffrage expert,” Georg Heink.<sup>70</sup> Like his predecessor Rumpelt—who now became Dresden's regional governor—Heink had previously served as a district governor. In 1906 he took up the task of drafting a new suffrage bill.

Georg Heink incorporated some of Siegfried's ideas about proportional representation into the government's suffrage reform plan announced in July 1907. Siegfried's expert reports (*Gutachten*) did not concern only proportional representation, but that was his main concern. Hohenthal asked Siegfried in October 1907 to come to Dresden “for a few days” to provide advice to Heink. But by May 1908, when the lower house was deadlocked over suffrage reform, Siegfried had lost much of his confidence that the Landtag would devise a workable proposal. He wrote to Heink in April 1908, suggesting that Hohenthal must insist on proportional representation: “otherwise the wrangles between city and countryside will be perpetuated.”<sup>71</sup> But Siegfried had also lost credibility. He suggested that the legislative impasse could be circumvented by devising a new voting law for an ad hoc Landtag that would meet only once, as a kind of constituent assembly. Beside this suggestion, the word “nonsense!” appeared in the margin.<sup>72</sup> By then the majority parties in the Landtag had already identified a plural suffrage, not proportional representation, as the only viable alternative to the three-class suffrage of 1896.

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Landtag deputies also refused to accept arguments put forward by one of central Europe's foremost constitutional scholars, Professor Georg Jellinek. Already “the exponent of public law in Austria”<sup>73</sup> in the 1880s, Jellinek's *General Theory of the State* (1900) had cemented his international reputation.<sup>74</sup> Jellinek took account there of the “leveling” and “democratizing” forces that were changing Wilhelmine society. In his other work he also took up constitutional issues central to reform debates at this time. These included suffrage reform in Austria, the United States, and various German Landtage; the Reichstag's Election Oversight Committee; parliamentary obstruction; the role of the Kaiser in a constitutional monarchy; ministerial responsibility; human rights; and the women's movement.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Siegfried to Saxon Mdl, 4.1.06, enclosing “Zur Frage der Umgestaltung des sächsischen Landtagswahlrechts,” SHStAD, Mdl 5466; *ibid.* for Siegfried to Mdl, 27.9.07; Hohenthal to Siegfried, 14.10.07; and other correspondence. See also Mdl 5494.

<sup>70</sup> Erich Friedrich Albert Georg Heink served as *Regierungsrat* and *jur. Hilfsarbeiter* with the KHMS Zwickau before 1897; as AHM Annaberg 1897–1900; as AHM Leipzig 1901–06; as *Vortragender Rat* in the Mdl and, by 1908, as *Ministerialdirektor*; Klein, *Sachsen*, 380, 390; *SParl*, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Letter of 11.4.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5494, sent with a reprint of Siegfried, “Pluralvotum und Proportionalwahl.”

<sup>72</sup> Marginalia to Siegfried to Mdl, 18.5.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5466.

<sup>73</sup> Jellinek to his wife Camille, 7.8.86; Jellinek, *Schriften*, 1:46.

<sup>74</sup> Jellinek, *Staatslehre*.

<sup>75</sup> Jellinek, *Schriften*, esp. vol. II, secs. VI and VII; cf. other works by Jellinek cited in the bibliography; Schönberger, “Liberaler”; Kelly, “Rights of Man.”

On 18 March 1905, Jellinek delivered a guest lecture to members of Dresden's *Gehe-Stiftung*. This foundation provided a meeting place for some of Saxony's most influential public intellectuals.<sup>76</sup> Lectures at the *Gehe-Stiftung* targeted an audience that all parties sought to mobilize for their own ends: shopkeepers, small businessmen, workers, civil servants, and retirees. In his address, Jellinek spoke on "The Plural Suffrage and its Effects."<sup>77</sup> He discussed suffrage proposals put forward in Saxony since 1903. He seconded the complaint—made frequently by Saxon National Liberals—that by preserving the distinction between voters in cities and the countryside, the "*plural* suffrage system can be described as a *rural* suffrage system." He also took aim at Charles Benoist's "organic" theory of the universal suffrage because it sought to drive Social Democrats out of parliament. Saxons should have realized after June 1903 that it was a mistake to exclude all representatives of an oppositional party from parliament: doing so gave rise to "much more unfortunate extra-parliamentary battles, fought ever more fiercely." Jellinek understood that Saxons faced a difficult decision. "With a stroke of the pen, the legislator can award an [extra] ballot to many thousands of people and thereby arbitrarily diminish the significance of those entitled to fewer votes." Even the plural suffrage was an "instrument" that could produce "the most diverse melodies."

Jellinek asked his audience how the achievements of a voter should be measured in terms of his right to participate in the affairs of state.<sup>78</sup> "Even someone who is twenty times as clever as someone whose talents extend to simple understanding can hardly elect a parliamentary deputy who is twenty times better . . . Just as no one can say that this girl is four times prettier than that one, so, too, is it impossible to convert the intellectual measure of one man into a multiple of mediocrities." For Jellinek, an estate-bound suffrage, a plural suffrage, mandatory voting, and proportional representation were all too far from the democratic ideal: none of them, he felt, should not be considered for Saxony's Landtag. Without mentioning the word "democracy," Jellinek urged his audience to reject all complicated suffrages: "either one is capable of exercising a public function, or one is not . . . There is no half or one-third ability: either the voter is completely able to carry out the function conceived for him, or not at all." Therefore both political theory and the practical needs of the Saxon state argued against creating first- and second-class citizens (let alone fourth-class ones) with a plural suffrage. No state, Jellinek observed, would be wise to "divide its active citizens according to larger or smaller [electoral] rights." Moreover, if a state were to "stand by idly while such an attempt at disenfranchisement is made from a more powerful faction"—by which Jellinek could only have meant the Landtag majority under Mehnert's thumb—such a state "cannot hope to retain the participation and loyalty of the majority of its population in the long run."

<sup>76</sup> E.g. Drs. Victor Böhmert, Theodor Petermann, and Eugen Würzburger, all with Saxony's Royal Statistical Office; and Dr. Leo Ludwig-Wolf, a lawyer, Leipzig city counselor, and suffrage expert.

<sup>77</sup> Jellinek, *Pluralwahlrecht*: for the following, 6, 15, 29 (emphasis added), 32 (emphasis added), 34, 39, 43f.; idem, *Schriften*, 2:220–31.

<sup>78</sup> See above, pp. 287 and 366, on the connotations of *Leistung*.



Two other eminent scholars had been following Saxony's suffrage debate. The first was Jellinek's friend Georg Meyer. After a long career as a Reichstag deputy for the National Liberals, Meyer reached the same conclusions as Jellinek about proportional representation (as noted previously).<sup>79</sup> The second was a Saxon lawyer and statistician, Dr. Theodor Petermann. Although Petermann allegedly sympathized with Social Democracy, he was a "fixture of the Saxon business and intellectual elite." In March 1906 Petermann spoke in the *Gehe-Stiftung* on the topic of "Individual Representation and Group Representation."<sup>80</sup> Petermann railed against the debasement of the electorate as "*voting cattle*" [*sic*] and the "transformation of the parliamentary stage to a battlefield for fighting out class struggles."<sup>81</sup> Petermann offered nothing comparable to Jellinek's defense of democracy. His comments went in the other direction, emphasizing the importance of rewarding education and achievement in the electoral system.

#### DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

The case of Hugo Wiechel illustrates another important facet of suffrage debates in Saxony: the combination of grand theory with minute calculations about its practical implementation. Wiechel was a state-certified civil engineer and a pioneer of folklore studies in Saxony. His broad interests provided him the tools to devise a series of suffrage reform proposals which he sent to Saxon and Prussian ministers. They illustrate how an "everyman" in Saxony—albeit one who was well-educated and highly motivated—could feel part of a reform project that had great significance for Germany's future.

Some months before June 1903, Wiechel devised a *Kartogramm* for the upcoming Reichstag elections. With two electoral maps and dozens of statistical tables, Wiechel inveighed against the failure to redraw Reichstag constituency boundaries since 1867. This sin of omission had produced Reichstag constituencies with vastly different numbers of enfranchised electors, and it massively disadvantaged (mainly Social Democratic) voters in Germany's largest cities. Saxon readers learned from his calculations that their kingdom should have seven more Reichstag deputies than its present twenty-three.<sup>82</sup> The SPD's *Neue Zeit* warmly endorsed Wiechel's *Kartogramm*: it showed "more clearly than the most stirring speech the crying inequity of the [present] suffrage."<sup>83</sup> Just before Saxony turned "red" in 1903, Wiechel published a second proposal. It illustrated what the Reichstag and the Saxon Landtag might look like in the future.<sup>84</sup>

Wiechel divided up Saxony's eighty-two Landtag seats along two axes. The first axis divided the total number of deputies first in half—left and right—and then in

<sup>79</sup> Meyer, *Wahlrecht*, esp. 445–9. Jellinek helped publish this work posthumously.

<sup>80</sup> Petermann, *Individualvertretung*. Petermann subsequently edited the influential work *Die Großstadt* (Dresden, 1903), to which Gustav Schmoller and Friedrich Ratzel contributed seminal essays.

<sup>81</sup> Petermann, *Individualvertretung*, 13, 31, and passim. Cf. Triepel, *Wahlrecht* (1900).

<sup>82</sup> Haack/Wichel, *Kartogramm*, 9. <sup>83</sup> *NZ* 21, H. 37 (1903): 2:348.

<sup>84</sup> Wiechel, *Berufsklassen-Wahlkreise*, SHStAD, Mdl 5465.

quarters, according to occupations categorized as industrial, business, “central,” and agricultural. The second axis divided those same eighty-two seats into three classes, A, B, and C.<sup>85</sup> In each case, these constituencies were based not on geographical units but on a combination of occupation and class. Within each occupation, subgroups were listed, to a total of twelve. Wiechel then overlaid this scheme, already complicated enough, with a plural suffrage. It allocated extra ballots—up to a maximum of fourteen—to all occupational subgroups save the lowest. It also privileged electors who were over fifty years of age, who had served in the military (or reserves), whose property ownership or income exceeded a certain threshold, or who had graduated from a secondary school (*Realschule* or *Gymnasium*) or a university. He clearly prided himself on being able to demonstrate how Saxony’s parliament would be constructed if his plan were implemented.<sup>86</sup>

Wiechel imagined he could allocate every Landtag seat to a particular combination of sub-occupation and sub-class. His premise for doing so was that the epoch of traditional political parties was over. But immediately Wiechel contradicted himself. Based upon his graphical representation of a future Landtag, he foresaw the emergence of an “industrial party, a business party, a central party . . . , an agricultural party, a lower-class caucus, a *Mittelstand* caucus, and an upper-class caucus.” Wiechel estimated that one-fifth of voters in Class C and four-fifths of voters in Class B would “set themselves with conscious resolve against any possible excesses of Social Democracy.” Together with Class A, “two-thirds of the Landtag [would stand] as a firm barrier against any kind of revolution.”<sup>87</sup>

What did Wiechel hope to achieve with his proposal? Because it was bolstered by statistics, he argued, first, that it did *not* represent a leap in the dark. He hoped, second, that differences of opinion among occupational groups and classes would drive “hatred and divisiveness” out of Saxony’s parliament. Third, his combination of occupational and class-based voting promised to bring voters and their parliamentary representatives closer together. Wiechel yearned for the era of National Liberal ascendance in the 1870s, when the new nation-state had been “armed” for the future by “the German sword and the true German heart.” But in 1903, there was “only *one path* to this goal: . . . [the creation of] constituencies based on occupational classes.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> They were allocated twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and twenty-seven seats, respectively.

<sup>86</sup> Wiechel envisioned Class C as including 572,000 eligible electors with one, two, or three ballots each, yielding a total of 906,000 ballots to be cast. The “wide stratum of workers and lower civil servants” would have a single vote; but age or military service would create “so to speak a working-class aristocracy” of electors with two or three ballots each. Class B, divided into only two parts, would include 210,000 eligible electors with four or five ballots each, yielding a total of 936,620 ballots to be cast. Class A was divided into nine subgroups who would cast between six and fourteen ballots. A total of 102,000 eligible electors would have a total of 906,000 ballots to cast in LT elections.

<sup>87</sup> According to Wiechel’s estimates, the “right half” of the Landtag (forty-two seats) would be elected by electors in the following occupational subcategories: agriculture, services, trade, commerce, and civil servants. The “left half” of the house would include forty deputies representing industry and business. Wiechel, *Berufsklassen-Wahlkreise*, 16f.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Wiechel believed that everything he had suggested for Saxony's Landtag could also be implemented for a reformed German Reichstag. He had more tables and graphs to prove it.<sup>89</sup> But even the casual observer can see the absurdity of his calculations. For example, Wiechel forecast the election of only one Catholic clergyman to "his" Reichstag. An unidentified civil servant in Prussia's foreign office commented scathingly on Wiechel's complicated system.<sup>90</sup> "The author appears to see absolutely no need to take into account the existing political parties or the wish of the voter to cast a vote according to his political motivation." This civil servant concluded that "as long as Saxony has not tried the experiment [provided by] this example, there is no reason for the Reich to deal with the proposal."

Wiechel's role in Saxony's suffrage debates was not over. In the spring of 1906 he overhauled his 1903 proposal from top to bottom. This time he proposed *Three-Vote Constituencies with Supplementary Votes (Plural Votes)*. With reference to our earlier distinction between "in order to"-arguments and "because of"-arguments, only two aspects of this proposal merit consideration here: its ultimate aim and its foundational principles. Wiechel's new suffrage was meant to allow Social Democrats *some* representation in the Landtag—but not too much. Wiechel argued that the election of "up to" twenty-five Social Democrats in an eight-two-seat Landtag should be acceptable.<sup>91</sup> Not worthy of discussion was any scheme that would deprive the non-socialist deputies of their two-thirds majority. Second, Wiechel wanted to find a "golden mean" between the two voting systems that had allowed the SPD to win twenty-two of Saxony's Reichstag seats in 1903 but had driven every SPD deputy from the Landtag. Third, he wanted to address the alleged imbalance between the weight of votes cast by city-dwellers and country-dwellers. Fourth, his proposal would loosen the SPD's hold on the working classes, which should be "free, not impudent."<sup>92</sup>

Wiechel reverted to the idea of geographical constituencies as the basis of his updated suffrage scheme. But his system was built on two understandings of the plural suffrage: the possibility that more than one deputy would be elected in each constituency,<sup>93</sup> and the provision of extra votes to certain privileged

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Tafel II, following 29. First Wiechel plotted the RT of 1895 according to the occupation of German voters. Second, by dividing RT seats according to *Berufsklassen-Wahlkreise*, he showed what a future RT would look like. For the sake of simplicity he did not indicate the division of seats among the three occupational classes; hence the symmetry of his imagined parliament was perfect. The "right wing" ("A") included five sub-groups of agriculture and represented 170 seats. The "center" ("B") was a polyglot, but it too included five sub-groups and represented 110 seats. The "left wing" ("C") included five sub-groups of industry and represented 117 seats, for a grand total of 397 seats—the current size of the RT.

<sup>90</sup> Unidentified memo, 16.6.03, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 16. Wiechel's brochure had been published (in Dresden) on 1.6.03.

<sup>91</sup> Wiechel, *Dreiwahlkreise und Zusatzstimmen*, 15f.

<sup>92</sup> "Frei, nicht frisch." Ibid., 39.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 14f. Three MdLT would be elected in each of Saxony's twenty-three existing RT constituencies. That would yield sixty-nine deputies. Thirteen more MdLT would be elected in those constituencies (seven) with a disproportionately high number of eligible electors. The largest of these, 13: Leipzig-County, would be allocated seven deputies. The constituencies of 16: Chemnitz, 6: Dresden-County, and 4: Dresden-New City would each be allocated five deputies. 5: Dresden-Old City, 18: Zwickau, and 12: Leipzig-City would get four deputies. The remaining sixteen RT constituencies would be represented by three LT deputies each. On the second count, Wiechel

electors.<sup>94</sup> This system, argued Wiechel, would prevent Social Democrats from winning even half of Saxony's Landtag constituencies. Wiechel dismissed other plans that would not yield the desired result. If no extra votes were awarded, the proportion of non-socialist electors would only slightly exceed that of SPD ones.<sup>95</sup> If extra votes were allocated only on the basis of age, he predicted forty-seven seats for the "parties of order" versus thirty-five seats for the Social Democrats. Only Wiechel's proposal would yield the hoped-for outcome: fifty-seven seats for the *Ordnungsparteien*, twenty-five seats for the SPD. This plan, Wiechel wrote confidently, would win broad support in all quarters—"if the expected number of 25 Social Democratic deputies does not stir up objections."<sup>96</sup> Wiechel believed his plural suffrage would overcome the threat that election battles between Social Democrats and their enemies would result in mutual annihilation. A new *Mittelpartei* would draw recruits from the ranks of Social Democracy. Thereafter, the new suffrage would "automatically" bring "calm and discretion" back to the floor of the Landtag: even Social Democrats in the house would be rendered "unthreatening."<sup>97</sup>

Circumstantial evidence tells us that Wiechel's proposals helped shape the Saxon government's suffrage bill announced in July 1907. The government's draft legislation again tried to combine two voting principles into a hybrid system, as it had in 1903. After reform was enacted in January 1909, the first test of new suffrage in October 1909 yielded exactly the number of Social Democrats (25) that Wiechel thought could—or should—enter the Landtag. Less clear is whether government leader Hohenthal and his suffrage expert Heink followed Wiechel's final recommendation to make the Landtag functional again. He advised them to mix "chancellery'-ink" with "a drop of blood from the heart."

## GAME CHANGERS

Like Wiechel's second proposal, other models for Saxon suffrage reform were put forward in the first half of 1906. This timing is significant. The suffrage reform movement had reached a turning point. New suffrages were passed in Lübeck, Hamburg, and Württemberg. Elsewhere too, reform was in the air. In Saxony, the government was in disarray: it had no positive proposals of its own to offer.<sup>98</sup>

proposed that in constituencies with three to five MdLT, the candidates with the most votes would be elected; only in 13: Leipzig-County would a special arrangement be needed.

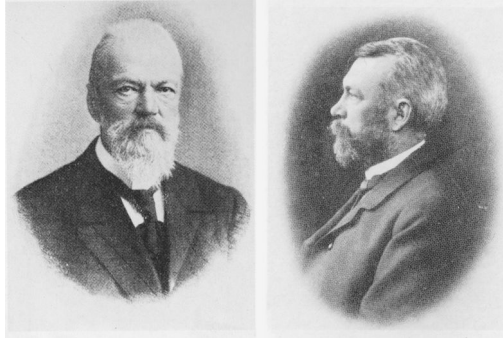
<sup>94</sup> Wiechel's statistical tables purported to show the consequences of awarding extra votes to certain electors and—addressing a matter of great interest to Saxony's MdL—how many of these would go to socialist supporters. He allocated zero, two, or four "extra" votes to electors aged 25–40, 41–55, and 56 and over. He allocated zero, two, or four "extra" votes to three groups of electors according to their tax exposure. Lastly, extra votes were awarded on the basis of property ownership. Wiechel ignored electors with higher education or military service. Here, as elsewhere, I use "electors" to refer to adult males who were enfranchised for LT elections and who thus were *potential* voters.

<sup>95</sup> 338,975 eligible electors in the non-socialist camp, 317,670 favoring the SPD.

<sup>96</sup> Wiechel, *Berufsklassen-Wahlkreise* 1903, 24 (emphasis added).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 41f., and for the following.

<sup>98</sup> Metzsch was replaced by Hohenthal on 1 May 1906, after the LT session was completed. The LT's suffrage committee (*Wahlrechtsdeputation*) produced no useful ideas during its meetings from



**Figure 9.2.** Regional Governors Otto von Ehrenstein (Leipzig) and Anselm Rumpelt (Dresden).

Source: Thomas Klein, ed., *Sachsen*, vol. 14 of *Grundriß zur deutschen Verwaltungsgeschichte 1815–1945*, Reihe B (Marburg, 1982), back matter, for both portraits.

This opened the door for others who did. The Landtag session of 1903/04 had swept aside Metzsch's *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903. Social Democratic blood had been spilled in the streets of Dresden in December 1905 (see Chapter 10). And rumors were buzzing that Metzsch would resign soon. Those rumors were true. But how soon? No one knew. Into this vacuum strode three prominent Saxons who used their insider status to reopen a path to reform.

Otto Georgi had served as Leipzig's mayor from 1876 to 1899. His father Robert had been Saxony's finance minister during the revolution of 1848/49, and Otto had been closely involved in devising a three-class voting system for Leipzig and the Saxon Landtag in 1894–96. As a Leipziger, he knew where National Liberal and Conservative viewpoints converged. The second insider was Otto von Ehrenstein (see Figure 9.2), regional governor of Leipzig from 1887 to 1906. His proposal for a proportional suffrage system proved that his anti-socialism remained as virulent as it had been in the 1880s. Ehrenstein warned Metzsch after the Reichstag election of 1903 that Saxons were "standing atop a volcano."<sup>99</sup> In his pamphlet of 1906 he cited a comment made during Hamburg's own suffrage debate: "The statesman who insists upon evidence first will always arrive too late."<sup>100</sup> The third insider was Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz. His uncle (Hermann), as minister of the interior, had helped forge the Saxon suffrage of 1868 and led the struggle against Social Democracy under the Anti-Socialist Law. His father (Oswald) had served as Saxony's envoy to Prussia from 1873 to 1885. In 1906 the young Nostitz was a counselor in Dresden's foreign ministry. He burst onto Saxony's political scene in July 1907 when he characterized Mehnert's influence in Saxony as a "backstairs

early February to late March 1906; before then the SPD MdLT Goldstein had withdrawn from what he called the "*Wahlrechtsverschleppungskommission*"; SHStAD, MdI 6467.

<sup>99</sup> Ehrenstein to Metzsch, 24.8.03, SHStAD, MdI 5465.

<sup>100</sup> Ehrenstein, *System*, 35.

government" (*Nebenregierung*), as we will see in Chapter 11. A storm of disapproval greeted Nostitz's candor in mid-1907. But he had proposed a new Landtag suffrage eighteen months earlier, in January 1906.<sup>101</sup>

These three men not only belonged to Saxony's political elite in 1906; they were conspicuously worldly. For three decades, Otto Georgi had served as mayor of Saxony's most intellectually vibrant city. Leipzig also stood at the crossroads of trade that was becoming global. Ehrenstein, too, was the son of a Saxon finance minister, but his horizons were not narrow. His wife Mathilde was the daughter of a prominent Hamburg banker and sister to one of Hamburg's richest grain importers and patron of the arts, Henry P. Newman. Nostitz-Wallwitz was married to a Hindenburg by birth. Helene von Nostitz-Wallwitz was a renowned beauty—she was once sculpted by Rodin—and she helped her husband maintain a lively salon in their home.<sup>102</sup> In short, these men were exceptional—and exceptionally well-placed to influence Saxon bureaucrats who spent the next year (mid-1906 to mid-1907) devising the government's new suffrage reform. The government's reform proposal of July 1907 incorporated suggestions made by each of them—about what a new suffrage might look like and about what principles of fairness it should reflect. Through their eyes, the suffrage of the future began to come into focus.

Counter-intuitively, Otto Georgi began his brochure *On Reform of the Suffrage for the Second Saxon Chamber* by citing the essay "What is democracy?" written by the revisionist Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein.<sup>103</sup> Georgi claimed that Bernstein answered his own question: democracy was not "rule by the people" but "the absence of class domination." On this premise, Georgi argued that universal suffrage for the Saxon Landtag should not be advocated even by Social Democrats themselves. Georgi dismissed a long list of other suffrage reforms suggested since 1903, citing Richard Siegfried, Georg Jellinek, Charles Benoist, and Albert Schäffle, among others.<sup>104</sup> His aim reflected National Liberal theory, for he wanted to find a voting system "that is as fair as possible toward all classes of the population; that produces the most complete possible picture of the organism of the state through its political representation; that brings fulfillment to the political life of the people and, at the same time, offers the best guarantee that parliament will be led by intellect and expertise." Georgi did not explicitly refer to the Reichstag elections of June 1903 or SPD "terror." Thus his proposal was less obviously anti-socialist than most other suffrage plans floated at this time.

Georgi wanted to see Saxony adopt an electoral system comprised of four parts, yielding a Landtag of ninety deputies. (Unlike most other National Liberals, Georgi ignored the Landtag's upper chamber.) He proposed the election of (A) forty-two deputies by general, equal, and direct vote, tempered by proportional representation; (B) fifteen deputies through "occupational elections";<sup>105</sup> (C) twenty-four deputies

<sup>101</sup> Nostitz-Wallwitz to Metzsch, 31.1.06, with his "Gedanken . . ." (MS), SHStAD, Mdl 5466.

<sup>102</sup> See Venus, *Amtshauptmann*, 34ff.

<sup>103</sup> Bernstein, *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus*, cited in Georgi, *Reform*, 11–12.

<sup>104</sup> For the following, Georgi, *Reform*, 11f., 35–7, 39f., 42ff., 54f., 79–81.

<sup>105</sup> They would represent agriculture (five), trade and industry (five) and small business (five).

chosen indirectly by municipal and rural councils;<sup>106</sup> and (D) the allocation of one or two seats each to represent lawyers, doctors, clergy, teachers in primary schools and (separately) institutions of higher learning, and lastly “civil servants and other occupations.” Georgi felt that a hybrid system with fewer than four components failed to meet his criteria of fairness, comprehensiveness, security, and objectivity.

Otto von Ehrenstein believed that an occupational suffrage would meet his twin goals of “calling all segments of the population to participate in public life” and yet creating “a dam against the overwhelming intrusion of the party of revolution.”<sup>107</sup> He worried that the introduction of proportional representation would deliver “almost half” of all Landtag seats to the Social Democrats. Ehrenstein went further: even one-quarter of Landtag seats was “far too many.” Citing the socialists’ proportion of seats in the 1903 Reichstag (eighty-one of 397) and the 1895 Saxon Landtag (fourteen of 82), Ehrenstein concluded that allowing Social Democrats to fill one-fifth of the Landtag was a threshold that “must not be exceeded under any circumstances.” Yet he rounded *down* when he calculated the number of SPD deputies he could tolerate in a reformed Landtag: not sixteen seats (one-fifth of eighty) but only twelve.

Later in his proposal Ehrenstein offered other arguments in favor of limiting Social Democratic influence in any state parliament. It was wrong, he claimed, to believe that the SPD would become more “reserved and objective” if allowed to participate in the business of government. It was also wrong to consider certain kinds of suffrage schemes as viable: the most important criterion had to be whether any given suffrage “used the means at hand” to defend against “the imminent threat.” Otherwise, the principle of equality could be taken *ad absurdum* to give the vote to criminals and insane persons—and even to women.

In Ehrenstein’s future Landtag, comprising eighty deputies, forty would be elected by direct, secret ballot (again tempered by a form of proportional representation). Voters would cast either one or two ballots for these forty deputies. Twenty-eight deputies would be elected by more affluent voters who, because they paid more than 2,500 Marks in annual taxes, would cast two ballots. Twelve deputies would be chosen by voters who paid less taxes and therefore cast only one ballot. Of the remaining forty deputies to be elected, members of the municipal councils in Saxony’s five largest cities would elect sixteen; members of rural councils in Saxony’s five administrative regions would elect twenty-four. Ehrenstein did not bother to provide statistical evidence that his system would limit the number of Social Democratic deputies to the desired maximum of twelve. He did not need to. Readers would have understood that privileging rich over poor voters and rural over urban voters in this way would achieve the desired outcome.

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<sup>106</sup> Allocating two seats each to Dresden and Leipzig, one seat to Chemnitz, three seats to the (relatively rural) KHMS Bautzen, and four each to the KHMS Chemnitz, Dresden, Leipzig, and Zwickau.

<sup>107</sup> Ehrenstein, *System*, 3. For the following, 16–20, 36–8.

Our third insider, Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz, sent his suffrage proposal privately to government leader Metzsch in January 1906. The details of Nostitz's proposed system were novel, but so were the goals his system was designed to serve.

Nostitz-Wallwitz used the Austrian categories of "curia" to designate the three main components of his scheme. Curia I comprised twenty deputies. Unlike any other reform proposal, Nostitz's scheme assigned the right to vote for each of those twenty deputies to a single type of voter. The first candidate would be elected only by full professors of a university, the second by full professors at a technical university, and so on. Candidates 7–10 would be elected by voters belonging to specific occupational categories: doctors, lawyers, artisans, and workers. Candidates 11–20 would represent Saxony's five administrative regions, with one candidate elected by rural voters and one candidate by urban voters. Curia II, numbering thirty deputies, would be elected by a three-class voting procedure. The three voting classes would not be defined by tax payment or income, but rather by their level of education. Nostitz listed the types of voters he considered to have "enough" education: these included even master artisans who oversaw more than one journeyman, and foremen in large factories. Curia III would elect thirty deputies by means of a general suffrage with proportional representation. For this purpose the entire kingdom would be considered a single constituency.

Nostitz needed only two pages to outline this electoral system. The rest of his long memorandum explained his rationale. Nostitz believed it was necessary to balance general participation in political life, respect for public opinion, and the orderly function of parliaments, on the one hand, against the twin threats of socialism and democracy, on the other. His prescription for achieving such a balance is historically significant because it reflected government leader Hohenthal's own views.<sup>108</sup> Like his superior, Nostitz believed that Conservatives had to "throw our anchor ahead of us into the future."<sup>109</sup>

Nostitz complained about the low level of political education in Germany and about social groups who had either disengaged from political life or obstructed it. Tellingly, Nostitz never identified which people, which parties, or which policies were responsible for this dismal situation. Here, Bismarck was conspicuous only by his absence. So were state ministers, left liberals, Catholics, and antisemites. Nostitz targeted only the Social Democrats' obstructive tactics in the Landtag and the Saxon Conservative Party's one-sided advocacy for agrarianism. Instead he painted a bigger picture of democratization and its consequences. The security and welfare of the state demanded that a future suffrage (for Saxony) "must make a concession to general, direct voting rights." He continued in the same vein: "Public opinion and the force of general political developments (neighboring states!)" made it

<sup>108</sup> See *DN*, 12.7.07; Prussian envoy to Saxony, Prince Hans zu Hohenlohe-Oehringen, 20.7.07, PAAAB, Sachsen 60. From 1903 to 1905 Nostitz had served as Saxon *Legationsekretär* in Berlin under Hohenthal when the latter was Saxon envoy to Prussia. Before that Nostitz had served under the AHM Kamenz. After returning from Berlin he was appointed *Regierungsassessor* with the *Oberverwaltungsgericht* in Dresden in 1906; *Vortragender Rat* and *Hilfsarbeiter* in the Dresden MdAA 1906–08; AHM in Auerbach after 1911; and AHM in Leipzig after 1914.

<sup>109</sup> See ch. 10; this phrase is also cited in LWRK, 212.



impossible to impose too many constraints on the principle of universal suffrage. Citing "Mehnert's Law" from 1896 and its narrowing of the suffrage, Nostitz wrote that "the bitterness found among broad sections of the population" brought "closer and closer the moment of ultimate collapse of the old order of things." On what basis could disaster be averted? Nurturing the principles of self-administration and fostering "parliamentarism" were Nostitz's answer: they provided the only way to convey a feeling of co-responsibility to politically active citizens. "One doesn't learn to swim in water overnight," Nostitz wrote; "but on dry land one never learns at all."

In Nostitz's view, the chasm between Social Democracy and every other party had forced National Liberals into the Conservative current. Except when agrarian and industrial interests clashed directly, National Liberals hardly had any independence left. This was a net loss for Saxony's electoral culture. Because the left-liberal Radicals and the antisemitic Reformers had also sunk to insignificance, there was nowhere besides Social Democracy to turn for those "worthwhile elements who are by no means revolutionary-minded but . . . [who] are also opposed to principled conservative policy." The disappearance of the middle parties increased the abrasiveness of political and social conflicts, angered those who were not inclined to adopt extreme positions, and forced them into the ranks of Social Democracy. Like others before him, Nostitz blamed the Kartell for the "spiritual stagnation" of Saxon politics. As the Kartell parties had gradually consolidated themselves into a "compact mass," all party ideals besides those of Social Democracy had lost their attraction. *Kartellpolitik* had proved its worth only once, in the Reichstag elections of 1887. Nostitz's conclusion was that groups like the Young Liberals, Friedrich Naumann's National Socials, and monarchist Christian workers had only to be given "light and air" to allow the healthy kernel within German political life to grow and thrive.

Addressing the two key issues that would determine the success of any Landtag suffrage reform, Nostitz asked: "1. Where lies the absolute borderline beyond which Social Democracy cannot be allowed to advance? And 2. By what means are those guarantees [against the flooding of the chamber by Social Democrats] best pursued?" Nostitz's answer to 1. was that the SPD could be allowed somewhere between twenty and thirty seats in the Landtag. To achieve this goal, Nostitz dismissed the kinds of suffrage schemes advocated by Georgi and Ehrenstein. No preference should be given to particular occupations directly. Nor should the organs of local self-administration become tangled up with Landtag elections: that would be "putting the cart before the horse." Municipal and rural councils bore a heavy political responsibility, but it was of limited, local scope: such councils had no role to play in electing Landtag deputies. Nostitz was equally convinced that a class-based suffrage should weigh *Bildung* alone, not "the size of the money-sack." Votes should be cast to defend ideals, not material interests. All twenty deputies elected in Curia I, he insisted, represented "valuable capabilities," not "interests." Academic learning, technical expertise, business credentials, cultural talent—these qualities were going to improve the general tenor and functioning of the Landtag. Nostitz had no sympathy for a suffrage that gave extra ballots to older voters.

In order to achieve what goal had Nostitz drawn up his suffrage proposal? Nostitz regarded it as a positive outcome if his suffrage plan increased “the chances for forming a viable liberal middle” and even “a non-socialist workers’ movement.” Candidates from the small minority parties also deserved at least a chance to enter the Landtag. If a future suffrage weakened his own party, the Conservatives, so be it, because in an industrial state like Saxony, such a suffrage would serve the greater good. If this makes Nostitz sound like a democrat, we should pause. Nostitz’s appraisal of democracy was ambivalent at best. The deficiencies of the two-party systems in Britain and America—because they were based on a division of spoils—provided a warning: Germans should not expect too much from the freer expression of independent opinion in parliament. In Nostitz’s view, the main point was to change the *style* of politics. “It may be that without the pressure of a parliamentary or a democratic principle of government—may heaven save us from that fate for a long while—gradually a real, not illusory, consolidation of our party life may come about.” Nostitz also wanted his reform to be understood as a *stage* of political development, which held within itself “the danger of a further democratization of the suffrage.” Nevertheless, he argued that Social Democrats might have to be allowed onto parliamentary committees; civil service reforms were necessary; and so was the “ethical and intellectual . . . education of future citizens.” Such citizens, Nostitz added confidently, need not be only men. Citing the Conservatives’ Primrose League in Britain to drive home his point, Nostitz asked “Why, with us, is it only Social Democracy that tries to exploit the influence of women as a factor of political power?”

As historians, if we go looking in Imperial Germany for reformist Conservatives who accepted that change was inevitable but who also defended the authoritarian German state, we will find others whose views on socialism and democracy resembled those of Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz. They were few in number, but they might have helped other Germans adapt more flexibly, and generously, to the challenges of social and political democratization.

#### CITADELS AGAINST DEMOCRACY

In 1905 the Association for Social Policy published a volume in its series on German municipal governance that documented how the city fathers (not mothers) in Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden introduced class-based suffrages.<sup>110</sup> Each of them was meant to limit or exclude the participation of Social Democrats in local government. The 1894 reform of Leipzig’s municipal suffrage has already been discussed.<sup>111</sup> Chemnitz and Dresden revised their electoral systems in 1898 and 1905, respectively, and Leipzigers seriously considered doing so again in 1906.

These revisions occurred against the background of conflict between liberals and Social Democrats since the 1880s. The liberal power monopoly in German

<sup>110</sup> Verein für Sozialpolitik (VfS), ed., *Königreich Sachsen*, including essays by Ludwig-Wolf, Hübschmann, and Heinze listed in the bibliography.

<sup>111</sup> See above, pp. 285–8; also Ludwig-Wolf, “Leipzig,” 137f.

municipal government, like its gradual demise, is now well-trodden terrain for scholars.<sup>112</sup> So is the SPD's effort to devise its own municipal program (*Kommunalpolitik*).<sup>113</sup> Saxony's battle against socialism in the two decades spanning 1900 directly affected the timing and direction of change in these three cities. Just as Leipzig's 1894 reform foresaw the entry of *some* Social Democrats into city hall, the new suffrages passed in Chemnitz and Dresden broke with the viewpoint that even one Social Democrat in parliament was unacceptable. Nevertheless, the anti-socialist intent of all three suffrage reforms was obvious.

Reformers in the industrial city of Chemnitz passed a new suffrage law in 1898, based on citizenship and occupational status.<sup>114</sup> Voters were divided into six classes, which elected fifty-seven members of the municipal parliament. All citizens who earned less than 2,500 Marks belonged to Class A.<sup>115</sup> All citizens who were required to pay fees for the old-age and invalid insurance schemes belonged to Class B. Civil servants, teachers, physicians and clergy were gathered in Class C. Class D consisted of people who engaged in trade and manufacturing and who earned more than 2,500 Marks annually. Class E included all owners and shareholders of manufacturing and joint-stock enterprises if their annual income exceeded 2,500 Marks.<sup>116</sup>

In 1905 Dresden's municipal parliament followed suit. Its deputies, too, devised a voting scheme based on occupation. Voters were divided into five classes, who elected a total of eighty-four representatives. Class A consisted of people without any profession; Class B included those who paid fees to the old age and pension schemes; Class C comprised civil servants, priests, lawyers, physicians, and intellectuals; Class D included those who were engaged in trade and industry but were not members of the Chamber of Commerce, while those who did belong to the latter were included in Class E. The Dresdeners added some new wrinkles. Their new suffrage privileged those who had held local citizenship for more than ten years. Thus every class contained two groups of voters: those who had been citizens of Dresden for more than a decade and those who had not.<sup>117</sup>

The bourgeois character of these reforms deserves emphasis. In local as in state-level politics, a majority of Saxon burghers appear to have believed that socialists were going to infiltrate, then dominate, then tyrannize municipal parliaments.

<sup>112</sup> As liberals lost relative power at the national and regional levels after the early 1870s, they became more determined to preserve advantageous suffrage regimes in German cities, where they dominated municipal politics into the twentieth century. Sheehan's and Croon's pioneering essays, "Liberalism" and "Vordringen," respectively, have been followed inter alia by Pogge von Strandmann, "Monopoly"; Niehuss, "Configurations"; Pohl, "Power," comparing Munich and Dresden; Michael Schäfer's work comparing Leipzig and Edinburgh. With Thomas Adam I developed this argument and provided further references in Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 6. See also Retallack, "Mapping the Red Threat."

<sup>113</sup> Von Saldern, "Kommunalpolitik," provides a good overview. The SPD journal *Kommunale Praxis* (1905ff.) is a motherlode, especially for Saxony. On Leipzig cf. Czok, "Stellung"; Brandmann, *Leipzig*; Adam, *Arbeitermilieu*.

<sup>114</sup> Chemnitz's population in 1905 stood at 243,476 persons, of whom about 16,500 held the *Bürgerrecht*; Hübschmann, "Chemnitz," 165.

<sup>115</sup> With a further division—A1 and A2—according to whether they earned more or less than 1,900 Marks.

<sup>116</sup> Hübschmann, "Chemnitz," 165–9.

<sup>117</sup> Rudolf Heinze, "Dresden," 115–21.

This was part of the *bürgerlicher Wertheimmel*—the bourgeoisie's value system.<sup>118</sup> When German burghers claimed for themselves positions of leadership in local society, they staked their claim to disproportionate influence in elections. But did their value system work the same way in electoral cultures at the state and national levels and when they moved between these political worlds? Despite "interior views" of the German bourgeoisie that scholars have put forward since 1980, this question remains open. For example, did the experience of living with the Leipzig reform of 1894 make some Landtag deputies more confident in 1907 that a partial opening to the socialists would not have cataclysmic consequences?

The support that wealthy city-dwellers provided for philanthropy and public works underpinned their arguments that they should be given privileges at the ballot box: they contributed the most to the well-being of the community and best understood how to ensure it would flourish. Reasonably, then, the lower classes that deferred to their leadership in the philanthropic sphere should do so politically. Consider the opinion of Dr. Johannes Hübschmann, who was a Chemnitz city counselor and contributor to the study commissioned by the Association for Social Policy. As Hübschmann put it, Chemnitz burghers believed that property and intellect should not be "sacrificed to headcounts" or the possibility that "a single party would achieve domination in the municipal parliament."<sup>119</sup> Chemnitz's occupational suffrage "enfranchise[d] the most diverse strata of the population according to the measure of their interest in the common good and of their importance to it; it also open[ed] up to the most insightful and talented men the prospect of being elected." Writing in 1905, Hübschmann reported that Chemnitz burghers' experience with the new suffrage had been "completely satisfactory."

With Hübschmann's outlook in mind, we should not be surprised that Saxony's minister of the interior was still willing in 1906–07 to see voting based on occupational estates included in the hybrid Landtag suffrage then being drawn up by his subordinates. Leipzig's city fathers looked favorably on the Chemnitz experience at exactly this time. Discussions about a possible second reform of their municipal suffrage yielded no tangible result. But one reform proposal by Leo Ludwig-Wolf—Leipzig's own suffrage expert—is illuminating. His proposal would have replaced Leipzig's three-class suffrage with six voting classes.<sup>120</sup> Ludwig-Wolf assumed that in two of these six classes, Social Democrats would win all the seats. This would have nearly doubled the number of SPD members sitting in Leipzig's municipal assembly (that is, its lower house). Ironically, the more conservative city council appeared willing to approve Ludwig-Wolf's proposal. But the "state-supporting parties" in the lower house were not prepared to dip another toe in dangerous waters. They voted against reforming Leipzig's suffrage a second time.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> See Hettling/Hoffmann, *Wertheimmel*.

<sup>119</sup> Hübschmann, "Chemnitz." Cf. Niehuss, "Strategien."

<sup>120</sup> See Retallack, *German Right*, 213, for further details.

<sup>121</sup> See StadtAL, Kap. 7, Nr. 36, Bd. 1; cf. Ludwig-Wolf, "Leipzig."

What can we take away from the wide array of suffrage models surveyed in this chapter? What historical significance did they have in local, regional, and national contexts?

Social science models and equations cannot do justice to the transnational, national, and subnational conversations in which these proposals played a part. Nor can they convey the degree to which the framers of Saxony's suffrage reform in 1907 drew eclectically from a *mélange* of ideas about how best to move forward. Government leader Hohenthal and his suffrage expert Heink assimilated the most convincing arguments from these materials after they landed in Saxony's interior ministry. It has been necessary, therefore, to sketch the webs of connection and lines of communication that allowed both theoretical reflections and practical models of a "modern" suffrage to shape the draft legislation these civil servants announced in July 1907. That announcement was just the opening shot in a protracted parliamentary battle to devise a "fair" but "safe" suffrage for Saxony's parliament. It turned out that Hohenthal's government was firing blanks: the "parties of order" treated the government's proposal with disdain as soon as it was announced and moved on to devise their own suffrage bill.

That outcome was both surprising and unsurprising. On the one hand, the "parties of order" put no trust in the advice of academics and other "scribblers." They charted their own course. On the other hand, they were able to build their suffrage legislation on the same foundation that underpinned the constitutional, ethical, and philosophical reflections examined here. The parties disagreed among themselves and with the Saxon government about many key issues, as we shall see. Yet, during the months and years in which suffrage was debated on the floor of the Landtag and in its committees, the *Ordnungsparteien* groped their way toward a compromise solution. That solution had to balance the same binary issues that these proposals made central to their argument: how to recognize the democratic sign of the times while refusing to deliver the existing social and political order into the arms of "revolutionary" socialism.

In 1903–07, those who considered suffrage reform often saw the issue in dichotomous terms: continuity vs. discontinuity, industry vs. agriculture, cities vs. countryside. Another dichotomy differentiated between those who contributed "enough" to the general welfare to deserve extra votes, and those who did not. Yet this kind of "either–or" thinking did not satisfy reformers who believed it was possible to devise a sliding scale of preferment. Such reformers proposed dividing electorates into as many as eleven occupational groups or awarding privileged voters as many as twenty supplementary ballots. Both occupational suffrages and plural suffrages continued to be seen as viable, not only at the "green desk" of government deliberations.

When reviewing discussions that led to the Saxon suffrage reform in 1868, we noted that Germans were ambivalent about whether social estates had been replaced by classes. They still were not sure in the first decade of the twentieth century. Some thought it might still be possible to allot electoral influence on this basis. Also noteworthy is Georg Jellinek's rejection of a plural suffrage—the only

suffrage that actually survived the political battles of 1903–09 in Saxony. Outside the ranks of Social Democrats, Jellinek was almost alone in rejecting the idea that certain groups of electors should be awarded extra ballots. Given that about half of all Saxon voters supported the SPD in Reichstag and Landtag elections, why did Saxon statesmen and parliamentarians so conspicuously ignore Jellinek's argument in favor of a democratic suffrage? Why was it defended by the SPD and not by liberals? This chapter has tried to provide some answers, but none of them are definitive.

We can draw insight from the distinction introduced at the outset, between "because of" premises and "in order to" premises for suffrage reform. The "in order to" premise offers its own internal tension. The suffrage reform proposals examined in these pages had a dual aim: to find a means to elect a popular representative body without permitting the domination of Social Democracy. The tension arose because Social Democrats had made themselves the irrefutable representatives of the working classes—more than 85 percent of the population—but they were seen by the remaining 15 percent as irreconcilable enemies. Hence, "in order to" arguments did not show the way to solving suffrage dilemmas.

However, "because of" arguments provided their own negative *frisson*: they offered little ground for consensus either. The principle of "one man, one vote" was rejected in part because it was championed by the Social Democrats. The chasm between "the party of revolution" and the "parties of order" remained a barrier to reform in part because Saxon burghers could not conceive how to begin bridging it. German suffrage regimes changed slowly and incrementally in part because "full" democracy had not passed the test anywhere by 1905: it was therefore ill-suited to German political conditions.

From these suppositions it was easy to conclude that democracy could not withstand the threat posed by revolutionary firebrands. But as Professor Rauchhaupt observed in 1914, we should listen to what was said about German suffrage reform—and what was not said. Few contemporaries debated the SPD's future role in parliamentary life head-on. Few considered the significance of leaving upper houses of parliament unreformed and the female suffrage unaddressed. Few could say which federal state now played a pioneering role in Germany's political modernization. In 1907, Saxony seemed behind the times in proposing a hybrid electoral system based on incompatible principles and procedures. By 1909, when its Landtag agreed on a *relatively* simple system of plural ballots, Saxony was once again a pioneer. But its government did not reap the laurels—nor did it deserve them—for having found the best alternative to democracy.

In 1908–09, the Conservative and National Liberal parties were able to seize the initiative from government leader Hohenthal, as they had previously seized it (twice) from government leader Metzsch.<sup>122</sup> Neither the government nor those majority parties drew up their suffrage schemes on a blank slate. Yet a

<sup>122</sup> That is, in 1895–96, when they proposed three-class voting, and in 1903–04, when they rejected the government's *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903 and its hybrid suffrage.

remarkably compact group of like-minded Landtag deputies devised a plural suffrage according to their own lights. Few Saxons would have guessed in 1903 that *this* suffrage would survive until 1918. Even fewer knew that suffrage reformers were predicting the entry of twenty-five Social Democrats into the Saxon Landtag. "The most conservative parliament in Germany" was about to be transformed.

# 10

## Crisis and Retrenchment

In the period 1903–05, a stunning victory for Saxon Social Democrats in Reichstag elections gave new urgency to Saxon suffrage debates. The period 1905–07 was marked by the same reciprocal relationship, but the sequence was reversed. Instead of an SPD victory wringing a new suffrage proposal from the government, street violence in December 1905 was followed by a victory of Saxony's Kartell parties in the next Reichstag election. The previous chapter explored the conversations about a "fair" or "modern" suffrage that characterized the years after 1903. Here we discuss popular protests, the rise of radical nationalism, and other motors of change that contributed to new ways of thinking about suffrage issues and election campaigning.

When tens of thousands of Saxons took to the streets, when hundreds of them suffered blows from police sabers and horses' hooves, when dozens of them landed in hospital or prison, a new kind of power struggle began. Would violence and the threat of a mass strike accelerate suffrage reform? Or would defenders of the authoritarian state slow things down by hitting out hard at a nascent insurgency?<sup>1</sup> Predictions went both ways. In the heat of battle, a line in the sand was difficult to discern, and neither side knew what weapons the other would deploy.

In December 1905, the authority of the Saxon state ministry reached a new low. Government leader Georg von Metzsch demonstrated that his critics were right: he lacked the insight and the courage to manage the crisis. On that occasion and during the Reichstag election campaign in January 1907, developments in Saxony were seen to have direct ramifications for Prussia and Germany. On both occasions, Conservative leader Paul Mehnert dealt directly with Chancellor von Bülow and his leading advisors in Berlin to steer events as best he could. Among normal channels of communication between Reich and state officials, he by-passed some and exploited others, always in the service of his own party's interests.

When Metzsch finally left office in April 1906, not everyone was confident that his successor, Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen, could dispel popular outrage about the slow pace of suffrage reform. As it happened, 1906 provided the breathing room Hohenthal needed for retrenchment. The mobilization of the extra-parliamentary Right generated new resources for an anti-socialist crusade, and the Reichstag election of 1907 provided the perfect opportunity to test them. These developments set the stage for the legislative "dance" in 1908 that finally yielded a new suffrage law in 1909.

<sup>1</sup> See Retallack, *German Right*, 3, 6.



## POWER OF THE STREET

[The crowd] tried with force to break through the line of gendarmes . . . As side-arms were drawn, many people from the crowd hit out with fists and canes; many rabble-rousing cries were also heard, such as "Bloodhounds," "Throw the dogs in the Elbe," "Cossacks."

—police report on the Dresden suffrage demonstration of  
3 December 1905<sup>2</sup>

In politics . . . people bleed and die . . . The activity of politics is human life at a stretch, full of heroism and duplicity. To understand it is to know how varied it can be, at this time and that place.

—Kenneth Minogue (1994)<sup>3</sup>

When mass rallies and street demonstrations erupted in Dresden, Leipzig, Chemnitz, and other Saxon cities, these protests were seen in the light of suffrage struggles in other parts of Europe at this time—in St. Petersburg, Prague, and Vienna, especially.<sup>4</sup> Were Saxons following an international trend? This was the view taken by Marxist historians in the German Democratic Republic. They celebrated the bravery of Saxon "revolutionaries" who were trying to replicate the Russian revolution of 1905 in their homeland.<sup>5</sup> Many years later, the cultural turn suggested a different perspective to West German scholars. They focused on Prussian suffrage demonstrations in 1910. This was "when Germans learned to demonstrate."<sup>6</sup> Both views help us put street violence specifically, and electoral culture more generally, in a larger perspective. Social Democratic protesters wanted to conquer more than Saxony's thoroughfares and public squares. But Germans did not first learn to demonstrate in 1910. The lesson—a bloody one—was learned in 1905, and the schoolroom was in Saxony, not further east or north.

## BOILING BLOOD

When they first called for suffrage reform demonstrations in November 1905, Saxony's Social Democrats remembered that they had been caught flat-footed exactly ten years earlier. In November 1895, Social Democratic deputies called

<sup>2</sup> Dresden Police Direktor Paul Koettig ("Geheim!") to MdI, 3.12.05, SHStAD, MdI 11043. Side-arms were sabers and truncheons, not pistols or rifles.

<sup>3</sup> Original preface to Minogue, *Politics*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ucakar, *Demokratie*, 219–68; LWRK, 142; Groh, *Integration*, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann, "Kampf"; Fricke, "Aufschwung"; Stern, "Auswirkungen"; Stern, *Despotie*; Czok, "Auswirkungen"; and works by Horst Dörner. Cf. Mörl, "Aufschwung," 132–91; for Leipzig, Baer, "Aufschwung." Among non-Marxist historians, Reichard, "Working Class," is outdated; Nonn, "Radicalism," is engaging in the manner of Evans, "Red Wednesday"; Schorske, *Social Democracy*, 28–58, provides context; LWRK, esp. 181ff., sets the gold standard, as do Lässig, "Terror," and idem, "Stagnation."

<sup>6</sup> Warneken et al., *Deutschen*; idem, *Massenmedium*; Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*. These studies tend to neglect the power of street protests in 1848 and the strike wave of the 1870s.

for universal manhood suffrage for the Saxon Landtag, but they discovered that Paul Mehnert already had the three-class suffrage in his back pocket. In 1905, Saxon socialists wanted to move quickly for a second reason. Russian protesters, in a land with a tiny labor movement, had “thrown out the beast of absolutism”—they were already being heralded as an avant-garde.<sup>7</sup> SPD leaders therefore decided to organize mass rallies before the Saxon government addressed the suffrage question and before the “parties of order” formulated their own plans.<sup>8</sup> Their local associations organized protest meetings for Saturday and Sunday, 18 and 19 November 1905. Within days SPD speakers were recruited for 130 meetings.<sup>9</sup> Party leaders decided that protesters, after listening to speeches, should march together toward the central squares in these cities. State authorities had no legal reason to intervene, but how far would they go to stop civil disobedience? Rumors were soon flying that Saxon soldiers had been told to stand ready for action and were given live ammunition—forty bullets each.<sup>10</sup>

Leipzig's city center became the focus of demonstrations that started around noon on Sunday, 19 November. Similar meetings were being held at the same time throughout the kingdom. About 10,000 participants attended the meetings in Leipzig. By the time they met up in the *Augustusplatz*, their number had increased to 20,000–30,000 protesters (this was a police estimate, to which the SPD press added another 10,000). Led by Leipzig's Reichstag deputy Friedrich Geyer, the street demonstration was peaceful. But the strategic objectives of the crowd underscored the newness of it all.<sup>11</sup> The demonstrators marched, chanted, and sang in front of the offices of the regional governor and the homes of the commanding general and the mayor. They even dared to parade past the *Thomas-kirche*, where Saxon soldiers were gathered for a Sunday service. In Dresden, six protest meetings were held on 19 December and one the next day. Jubilation that sounded like a “holy vow” greeted one socialist speaker who declared that “the Saxon worker can speak *Russian* [and] *Austrian* when the time comes.”<sup>12</sup> Yet “the audiences were restrained”: the police had no need to intervene.<sup>13</sup>

On 27 November 1905, government leader Metzsch replied to an interpellation in the Landtag: it asked whether the government planned to revise the suffrage in the current parliamentary session. Metzsch blithely told his listeners he had nothing new to offer.<sup>14</sup> He claimed that statistical studies had not yet been completed—

<sup>7</sup> Illge, *Zehn Jahre*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> “An die Parteigenossen Sachsens!” *SAZ*, 11.11.05. See also PAAAB, Eur. Gen. 82, No. 1, Bd. 20; SHStAD, Mdl 11042–43, 10993; Förstenberg's “Übersicht . . . 1905,” SHStAD, KHMSL 250 and KHMSD 124; and BAP, RLB-PA 944. Unless otherwise noted, the following account relies on these sources and studies listed in note 5.

<sup>9</sup> Including forty meetings in and around Dresden and forty-five in Chemnitz.

<sup>10</sup> According to Dörner, *Kämpfe*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> As noted in Nonn, “Radicalism,” 189.

<sup>12</sup> *SAZ*, 20.11.05, cited in Pr. envoy Carl von Dönhoff, 21.11.05, also for the following quotation about the demonstrations in Dresden; PAAAB, Eur. Gen. No. 82, No. 1, Bd. 20. Cf. *SAZ*, 18/22.11.05, cited in LWRK, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Förstenberg, “Übersicht . . . 1905,” cited previously. Pol.-Dir. Koettig (Dresden) to Mdl, 21.11.05, SHStAD, Mdl 11043; Cf. Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumente*, 2:476–544, esp. 492–4.

<sup>14</sup> *LTMit* 1905/06, II.K., 1:373 (27.11.05); cf. SHStAD, Mdl 5466.

even though the director of Saxony's Royal Statistical Office had presented him with scenarios based on a variety of suffrage laws fifteen months earlier.<sup>15</sup> According to Metzsch, the government still saw no merit in electoral systems based on plural voting, mandatory voting, or proportional representation.<sup>16</sup> After the day's proceedings, the Prussian envoy Carl von Dönhoff observed that Metzsch's bland statement would "bring the blood of the German worker to the boil."<sup>17</sup> Even the "parties of order" had received his remarks coolly. Metzsch remarked sullenly that "I'm sick of the issue up to here," drawing a line over his head. The Bavarian envoy Eduard von Montgelas, despite his personal friendship with Metzsch, showed no sympathy for the minister now twisting in the wind. That the Saxon government had no new initiative in mind appalled Montgelas: "The government flatly refuses to draw the logical consequence of the denunciation of the existing suffrage; rather, it pushes the responsibility and initiative in this political life-and-death question onto the chamber, thereby . . . abdicating [its duty] as a 'government' in the true sense of the word." Metzsch was relying on the support of Prussia to drag his heels "against the will of three-quarters of the population."<sup>18</sup>

Things soon turned ugly. Fueled by newspaper reports about the protesters who "captured" Vienna's *Ringstraße* on 28 November—with some 100 injuries—Social Democrats went over to the offensive.<sup>19</sup> The action began in Dresden at 11 a.m. on Sunday, 3 December. Seven protest meetings were held, with 15,000 attendees in the halls themselves and late-comers waiting in nearby streets and pubs.<sup>20</sup> At each meeting, SPD leaders avoided incriminating themselves: they were confident that their followers would do "the right thing at the right time" *without* landing their spokesmen in jail. The absence of women in the street protests suggests that the participants were expecting the possibility of a violent confrontation with the police. By one estimate, between one-sixth and one-quarter of Dresden's adult male population took to the streets.<sup>21</sup>

As they left these meetings, the crowd marched through Dresden's *Neustadt* toward bridges across the Elbe. These were guarded by lines of police and mounted patrols. The first clash came when demonstrators broke through the police line at the north end of the *Augustusbrücke* and confronted police guarding the south end, which opened onto the *Schloßplatz* in the *Altstadt*. The crowd halted but refused to turn back. "Suddenly, after about two minutes, the cry arose 'Through them! Forward!'" The crowd tried twice to break through the line of gendarmes, but it

<sup>15</sup> Eugen Würzburger to Saxon MdI, 29.8.04 (copy), PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 7.

<sup>16</sup> See ch. 9 of this book. <sup>17</sup> Dönhoff, 29.11.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Bavarian envoy Eduard von Montgelas, 29.11.05 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963.

<sup>19</sup> Pol.-Dir. Koettig ("Geheim!") to MdI, 3/21.12.05, SHStAD, MdI 11043, and for some of the following. Cf. *ibid.* for reports from police directors or KHM in other Saxon cities.

<sup>20</sup> *SAZ*, 4.12.05.

<sup>21</sup> Nonn, "Radicalism," 194, and *passim*. See also Montgelas (draft copy) and Consul Reichel's report (copy), both 4.12.05, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Karl von Braun, 5.12.05, and the later reports of 13/21.12.05, 10/24.1.06, 21.2.06, HHStAV, PAV/53. The British envoy in Dresden, Lord Hugh Gough, 4.12.05, wrongly reported "no serious injury . . . by any person on either side." TNA, FO 30/323.

held. Police also succeeded in preventing protesters from marching across the *Marienbrücke* and the *Carolabrücke*.

Over the course of the next three hours (until 3 p.m.), demonstrators made their way to the town square, and occasionally beyond, by way of side streets. Streetcar drivers had been instructed not to halt in the *Altmarkt*, but they were forced to do so by “a few hundred” people who then marched toward the royal palace with cries of “Revolution!” and “Down with the police!” Their goal was to capture and control the *Schloßplatz*. Feints and headlong rushes became a cat-and-mouse game in Dresden’s streets and public squares. One group that approached Friedrich August III’s palace cried “Out with the suffrage!”—and then showed how, by throwing stones through the royal windows. This and the singing of the Marseillaise within earshot of their monarch was too much for the assembled police. Some 200 of them had occupied the *Schloßplatz*, but they found themselves surrounded and attacked. A few gendarmes were beaten to the ground with fists and canes before they responded with sabers and riding whips. The demonstrators received slashes to their arms, backs, and skulls. One lost half an ear. But finally the *Schloßplatz* was secured. With the help of about 100 auxiliaries (*Wohlfahrtsbeamte*), the *Altmarkt* was secured too, then the *Wienerstraße* in front of Metzsch’s residence. As so often in such cases, it is not possible to say precisely what *kind* of violence occurred. In the “terrible jostling,” did people faint from the crush of their fellow demonstrators or were they knocked unconscious by police blows? Subsequent commentaries made clear that one man’s revolutionary militancy was another man’s civil courage.<sup>22</sup>

The events of 3 December produced paeans to Social Democratic heroism. The *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* on 4 December recounted the events of the previous day with predictable hyperbole. Yet it also put the Dresden violence into a broader context: “The spark of the Russian Revolution, the uplifting example of the Austrian proletariat, the brutal denial of the highest right of the citizen by Saxony’s Landtag and government, dysfunctional administration in the land, the threatening signs of what is to come—all this set souls afire, all this created the spirit from which arose what had previously been undreamt of in Saxony.”<sup>23</sup> Saxon burghers had now been confronted with the prospect of rebellion in their own capital. The bloodshed had “caught everyone by surprise,”<sup>24</sup> reported the Bavarian envoy in Dresden. His Austrian counterpart agreed, adding: “What appears almost everywhere in the present course of affairs—the passionate striving for a democratization and radicalization of suffrage laws—now also shows itself to be turning truly violent in Saxony.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See the satirical cartoon “After the Street Demonstration,” Plate 9 in this book. Drawn by Thomas Theodor Heine, its three elements are a child’s doll lying on the sidewalk, a bowler hat also lying on the ground, and a dramatic red splash of blood against the side of a building. The caption reads: “Only the tactful and cool-headed intervention of the police ensured that the peace was not disturbed.” This stands as one of Heine’s most biting critiques of German authority. Thomas Theodor Heine, “Durchs dunkelste Deutschland. No. 20. Nach der Straßendemonstration,” *Simplicissimus* 14, Nr. 52 (28 March 1910): 899.

<sup>23</sup> *SAZ*, 4.12.05.

<sup>24</sup> Montgelas, 4.12.05, cited previously; report of 17.12.05 cited in Lässig, “Terror,” 222.

<sup>25</sup> Braun, 5.12.05, cited previously.

Predictions of future violence quickly outpaced reality. The *Dresdner Zeitung*, for example, claimed without any evidence that 60–70 percent of workers were ready to unleash the political mass strike to realize their suffrage reform demands.<sup>26</sup> Contemporaries looked to the recent past too. Dresden's occupational suffrage, designed to hamstring Social Democrats, had been tested for the first time just weeks before these demonstrations broke out. Not only did voters unseat the Conservative–antisemitic coalition that had dominated Dresden's municipal politics since the 1880s; they also elected more socialists than anyone had expected. Fortress Dresden was no more: "A forward position of the existing system has been breached," wrote one observer, "thereby showing that artful suffrage strategies are not well suited to dissipate deep dissatisfaction among the broadest circles of the population."<sup>27</sup> Even international attention was drawn to the demonstrations. *The Times* of London upbraided Chancellor Bülow for treating the three million Social Democrats who voted in June 1903 as "traitors."<sup>28</sup>

More suffrage rallies were scheduled for mid-December 1905.<sup>29</sup> By then the SPD leadership felt it had more to lose than win from another violent confrontation with police or, possibly, armed troops.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, the SPD's lone Landtag deputy, Hermann Goldstein, had interpellated the government on the grounds of police brutality against the demonstrators. When Goldstein's motion was debated on 14 December, Metzsch declared that the police had acted with the full approval of his government. This statement was enough to win over to the government side Saxony's left liberals, who had timidly supported the socialists. Even Metzsch's hint of movement on the suffrage issue was too much for the Conservative and National Liberal deputies: late in the afternoon they cut off further debate, though not before declaring that the Saxon police should be commended, not censured, for their bravery.<sup>31</sup>

On Saturday, 16 December, the SPD's call for caution did not prevent crowds from marching through Dresden's streets. Violence erupted again.<sup>32</sup> This time the crowds, lacking leadership, often wavered or split apart. Most protesters vented their anger by hurling obscenities, not objects, at the police. But around midnight on 16/17 December, a determined crowd of about 2,000 persons—perhaps more—gathered in front of Metzsch's villa. There they faced nearly 100 police, including fifteen on horseback. When their forward ranks were barely seventy paces

<sup>26</sup> *DZ*, 8.12.05, SHStAD, Mdl 11144; Fricke, "Aufschwung," 787; Hermann, *Kampf*, 867.

<sup>27</sup> Montgelaß, 1.12.05 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963. Cf. Dönhoff, 6.1.06, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Cited (n.d.) in German Ambassador to Britain, Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich (London), to Pr. FO, 11.12.05, PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bd. 20.

<sup>29</sup> *SAZ*, 15.12.05. Besides sources already cited and LWRK, 160, see Leipzig Pol.-Dir. Bretschneider to KHMSL, 17.12.05; SHStAD, Mdl 11043; Dönhoff, 18.12.05, PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82 No. 1 Bd. 20. Nonn, "Radicalism," supplies the Dresden demonstrators' occupations. Cf. Pr. Mdl Bethmann Hollweg to Pr. Oberpräsidenten, 16.12.05; PAAAB, Eur. Gen. 82, No. 1, Bd. 21.

<sup>30</sup> *SAZ*, 15.12.05.

<sup>31</sup> *LTMin* 1905/06, II.K., 1:624–33 (Goldstein) and 633f., 639f. (Metzsch) (14.12.05); cf. *SPN*, 13.12.05.

<sup>32</sup> See Pol.-Dir. Koettig to Mdl, 21/22.12.05, SHStAD, Mdl 11043; cf. *DN*, 18.12.05.

from the police, they rushed toward them. With no more warning than "Forward, let them have it!" a shot rang out from the crowd. A bullet pierced the left cheek of a mounted policeman. Three minutes later two more shots rang out, this time without injury. (The police had not been issued firearms, so later SPD claims that warning shots had been directed toward the crowd were false.) Mounted police moved forward and drove most of the crowd from the street onto the sidewalk. There the protesters continued to hurl abuse at the police: "Pull the dogs from their horses!" "If we only had dynamite!" Others tried to flee, but police chased them down. The resulting injuries were mainly cuts or blows to the head but also "3 deep blows to the back" and "3 slashes in the back, 1 to the upper left arm, and 1 to the head." One man who was arrested after shouting repeated threats—"Stab the dogs to death!"—was found to have a dagger on his person. The fighting continued past 2 a.m., until exhaustion set in. Terrified, Metzsch had already dispatched his wife and thirteen-year-old son to a neighbor's home. Insiders were convinced that Metzsch would resign his post as soon as possible: his nerves were shattered. On 18 December, Metzsch submitted his resignation to Friedrich August III. The king initially accepted it with hardly a second thought or a kind word for his long-time minister. But then both men were persuaded that Metzsch's resignation would provide a dangerous precedent for all of Germany.<sup>33</sup>

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Talking Metzsch down from the precipice was described as a "farce" by the Bavarian envoy. It was stage-managed by Chancellor Bülow, his envoy in Dresden (Dönhoff), Saxony's envoy in Berlin (still Hohenthal at this time), and the presidents of the Landtag's upper and lower chambers: Count Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt<sup>34</sup> and Paul Mehnert.<sup>35</sup> With daily reports, Dönhoff kept Bülow informed about the fiery Landtag debate on 14 December, the "attack of the bellowing and drunkenly agitated mob" two days later, and Metzsch's precarious psychological state.<sup>36</sup> To Dönhoff's reports, Bülow and the Kaiser added marginal comments, which the chancellor backed up with stern instructions to Metzsch that he must remain at his post. Bülow was responding to frantic despatches from Mehnert in Dresden, who claimed the "suffrage question is only a pretext for the revolutionary movement that is now coming to light." It was easy to convince

<sup>33</sup> Montgelas, 18.12.05 (telegram, copy), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963; cf. Montgelas, 19/22/31.12.05, *ibid.*, and 13/25.1.06, *ibid.* 964; also Friedrich August III to Wilhelm II, 12.1.06, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, No. 2, Bd. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Not to be confused with future government leader Count Christoph Vitzthum von Eckstädt.

<sup>35</sup> Mehnert's cynical, shadowy role was noted by the Bavarian envoy Montgelas, 31.12.05 (draft), cited previously: "Things are still brewing among the people, but Mehnert, who precipitated everything, will again extricate himself from the affair and blame everything on the government."

<sup>36</sup> For this and the following, Dönhoff to Bülow, 21.12.05; Dönhoff's further reports of 22/23/25.12.05; and Bülow's draft memo "in the sense of . . . the attached letter from Mehnert," 23.12.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, Geheim, No. 2. Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 19/22.12.05, SHStAD, MdAA 3316 <sup>a-c</sup>, rpt. in Stern, *Auswirkungen*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 261–3. For Dönhoff's earlier and later reports, 12/21.11.05, 15/18/30.12.05, 2/3/13/19/24.1.06, 1.2.06, and the original of Mehnert to Bülow, 22.12.05, PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bd. 20.

Bülow that the Dresden violence was not merely a local affair but rather “the touchstone for the entire Reich.”<sup>37</sup> As the chancellor wrote (for Metzsch’s benefit), “If Social Democracy, in triumph, now sees that it has only to go into the street to topple a deserving, if unloved, German minister, then in the other parts of the Reich demonstrations could take place that would be much more serious than those in Dresden.”

Bülow instructed Metzsch to repress the demonstrators with all means at his disposal, citing the old saw about stirring up a hornets’ nest. Kaiser Wilhelm II chimed in with another suggestion. The Russian Revolution had shown, he claimed, that it was dangerous and demoralizing for military troops if they were asked to serve police functions while being prevented from engaging the enemy “immediately and fiercely.” The German soldier was too noble to shoulder arms when dirt and stones were being thrown at him. Hence, although troops should be deployed as a last resort, they should be instructed “to make use of their weapons immediately and not wait until the rebelling masses, as they so often do, push women and children to the front lines.”<sup>38</sup> Bülow passed on the hint to Dresden. If Metzsch did not undertake the “energetic, systematic repression of all possible future attempts to make politics in the streets,” then he would be giving the state’s “sworn enemies” a success that would “exceed their most audacious expectations.” Politically it would also be a grave mistake for Saxony’s government to announce it was considering a suffrage reform initiative: “nothing—nothing in the slightest—should be undertaken by the government until complete calm has been restored.”<sup>39</sup>

Although Mehnert claimed that Bülow’s “energetic intervention” in Saxony’s ministerial crisis worked a “miracle,”<sup>40</sup> the last weeks of December 1905 were marked by a sense of crisis. The SPD leadership had apparently lost its power to control “the masses.” Metzsch was trying to recover his nerves somewhere in the countryside. Even the Saxon king could not be counted on. The Prussian and Bavarian envoys agreed that Friedrich August III did not properly understand the situation. “He trusts in his popularity, which occupies his thoughts to a high degree.” The king was not *au fait* with the latest developments and had not digested their significance. For these reasons he regarded protesters as “wretches” who “must be beaten down.” He was also happy to see suffrage reform postponed to the 1907/08 Landtag session.<sup>41</sup> Reich authorities felt prepared to deal with further violence.<sup>42</sup> Berlin Police Director Georg von Borries, impressed by the moderate tone of SPD flyers, decided that the military would not be used in January 1906: he was “more afraid of the soldiers’ rowdiness than of the Social Democrats.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 19.12.05, cited previously, and for the following citation.

<sup>38</sup> Wilhelm II cited in Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 22.12.05, cited previously.

<sup>39</sup> Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 22.12.05, cited previously.

<sup>40</sup> Mehnert to Bülow, 22.12.05 (copy), cited previously.

<sup>41</sup> Dönhoff, 2.12.05, cited previously. Montgelas, 20/22.12.05 (drafts), cited previously.

<sup>42</sup> On 8.1.06 the PrStMin debated the demonstrations planned for 21.1.06; AB-PrStMin, 9:165f.; Hohenthal (Berlin) to Metzsch, 11.1.06 (draft), SHStAD, GsB 985 T. 1; Lerman, *Chancellor*, 301. On preparations in Saxony, SHStAD, Mdl 11043, and in other states, PAAAB, Eur. Gen. 82, No. 1, Bd. 20; also BLHAP, PP, Tit. 94, Nr. 12857.

<sup>43</sup> Memo of 12.1.06 (copy), SHStAD, Mdl 11043.

The SPD's respect for law and order won it no friends. As the first anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Russia approached, demonstrations were planned for "Red Sunday" (21 January 1906) in Germany.<sup>44</sup> In the Prussian province of Brandenburg one military commander included in his Order of the Day the instruction that, "if [revolutionary] barricades appear, then they are to be shelled before the infantry storms them."<sup>45</sup> No such action was required: the only barricades seen in German cities were those put up by the police themselves. In Berlin, ninety protest meetings were held, but the only provocation came from the state: troops were mustered in barracks and marched at intervals through the city. "Despite the fears in official and 'bourgeois' circles, . . . nothing exciting happened—not even a parade in the streets."<sup>46</sup>

Saxon authorities remained nervous. Dresden's police director banned a suffrage rally organized by the (left-) Liberal Association in Dresden, which had only thirty members.<sup>47</sup> In the backwater of Wurzen—a town not far from Leipzig—uniformed and plain-clothed police were assigned "morning, noon, and night" to factories, trying to prevent the distribution of leaflets and flyers. Pubs where rallies were scheduled to take place were locked up tight—with police inside waiting for the call to action. And 400 gendarmes met at the local shooting club "to 'discuss' current affairs."<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile Saxon judges meted out their own justice, to the applause of the non-socialist press.<sup>49</sup>

Berlin police noted that Saxon precedents helped ensure that the protests against the three-class suffrage in Prussia in January and March 1906 remained small and "harmless."<sup>50</sup> Not even a bloody incident in Breslau on 19 April, which generated the "tale of the hacked-off hand," sufficed to keep the blood of Saxon workers boiling. The police concluded that "a large part of the Social Democratic following, especially in trade union circles, has become weary of the constant speeches about the three-class suffrage." They even quoted the Social Democrat Franz Mehring to suggest that the crisis had passed: "It [has] now been decided to forgo revolutionary antics and, as Mehring put it so nicely, let the enemy 'roast over a slow fire.'" Other metaphors were used to explain why Social Democrats lost the initiative in 1906. Saxon SPD leaders believed the flame of revolution could now be nurtured on "pilot light." They had good reason to accept this modest role: the suffrage reform

<sup>44</sup> On official reactions to "Red Wednesday" in Hamburg (17.1.06), see Tschirschky, 18.1.01, and Dönhoff, 19.1.06, PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bd. 20; cf. Evans, "Red Wednesday."

<sup>45</sup> *Tagesbefehl* (19.1.06) cited in Fricke, "Aufschwung," 787.

<sup>46</sup> British Ambassador to Germany Sir Frank Lascelles to Br. FO, 26.1.06, PRO, FO 371, BFO-CF, reel 6, no. 3438, pp. 401–6 (also on Bülow's anti-SPD speech in the PHH).

<sup>47</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 11042; LWRK, 178f. Cf. Gough to Br. FO, 23.1.06, PRO, FO 371, BFO-CF, reel 6, no. 3131, pp. 322–4.

<sup>48</sup> Mörl, "Aufschwung," 147–56. Cf. Förstner, "Übersicht . . . 1906," SHStAD, Mdl 10994.

<sup>49</sup> Even before 21.1.06 they sentenced twenty-five "perpetrators" to nineteen years, eleven months, and twenty-seven weeks in prison. A spectacular judgment was rendered against the editor of the *LVZ*: described by Franz Mehring as part of the state's strategy of shock and awe (*Furcht und Schrecken*), it was more severe than any Social Democrat had served for years. *NZ* 24, H. 21 (1906), 1:673–6; *LVZ* flyer protesting these sentences, SHStAD, Mdl 11043; *LVZ*, 13.5.08; see newspaper clippings in BAP, RLB-PA 944; Dörner, *Kämpfe*, 63; LWRK, 179.

<sup>50</sup> This and the following in "Übersicht . . . 1905/06," Fricke/Knaack, *Dokumenten*, 2:493f. Cf. other materials in PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bd. 21.



movement was heating up in Prussia, and the long interval between Saxon Landtag sessions—from April 1906 to October 1907—made it impossible to keep the fire stoked at home. For some critics in the party, the Saxon SPD's failure to exploit its strategic breakthrough in 1905 was no less damning than its meek response to "suffrage robbery" in 1896. Others predicted that the party, by drawing back from violence, would attract even more fellow travelers from "respectable" circles than it had in the Reichstag election of June 1903. If the criticism was too harsh, the forecast was too rosy.

#### THE CULTURE OF WORKING-CLASS PROTEST

The violence of Saxony's suffrage demonstrations in December 1905 should not blind us to quieter ways in which the working classes were taking over public spaces in Imperial Germany. The "party of revolution" had shown that it was able to relocate its power—its processions, its songs, its *muscle*—on the political map. Geographically and symbolically, new terrain was conquered when SPD demonstrators moved inward from the "profane" working-class suburbs to the iconic centers of power. The latter were physical spaces and places: central squares, city halls, police headquarters, parliaments, ministers' residences, royal palaces. But they were also the symbolic seats of power of the authoritarian state: they had to be defended if it were to retain its legitimacy. In mounting that defense, the state faced constraints imposed by the law and public opinion. Police sabers did the trick, leaving cannon—as Kaiser Wilhelm had put it—for real emergencies. These methods succeeded in keeping revolution at bay until November 1918, but at a cost.

Bourgeois fears of the proletariat and workers' need for self-representation each determined the aesthetic signature of a demonstration.<sup>51</sup> Still, a peaceful demonstration could turn into a warning of what would come next; an *impressive* show of force could become *oppressive*.<sup>52</sup> Consider Lily Braun's description of a suffrage protest in front of the Kaiser's palace. It begins in harmony and ends in conflict: "They are singing. No one waved the conductor's baton, they do not look at each other once, and yet it is the same song that rings from every throat, that stormed the Bastille and the barricades: the Marseillaise. It strikes against the walls of the churches and the palaces . . . High over the imperial palace, its notes flow together—it sounds like the clanging of sharp blades—like Wotan's ghostly army."<sup>53</sup>

Germany's working classes intentionally provoked their "betters" by adopting middle-class manners. This was also something new. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the "parties of order" had been prone to cite examples of their enemies' undignified deportment, dress, or behavior, thereby identifying them as threats to the established order. Members of the "rabble" stood out because of their dirty clothes, their poor grammar, their drunken gait.<sup>54</sup> When they sought to enter

<sup>51</sup> Warneken, ed., *Massenmedium Straße*; Lindenberg, *Straßenpolitik*.

<sup>52</sup> The terms "*eindrucksvoll*" and "*drucksvoll*" are used in Warneken, "Gewalt," 97f.

<sup>53</sup> Lily Braun, cited *ibid.*, 105. Cf. Kaschuba, "Rotte," 92.

<sup>54</sup> See Warneken, "Schritte," 93 and *passim* for some of the following points.

the public sphere they stood out just as conspicuously with their wild demands and dreams of the future socialist utopia. By 1905 the face of socialism looked different. Suffrage protesters dressed in their Sunday best: dark suits for men, with clean overcoats, round bourgeois hats, umbrellas; or nice dresses for women, perhaps with flowered hats. These were people, as the *Vossische Zeitung* put it, "of whom no one could assume that they would commit a crime." Dressing well served other purposes: one was less likely to be set upon by police. But symbolically, Sunday dress stood for cultural and political ideals that the demonstrators were willing to fight for.

After 1900, what had previously been a conspiratorial term for a march, a rally, or a clandestine meeting—the *Spaziergang*—was used ironically, to describe workers' invasion of the bourgeoisie's public space and to emphasize how useless police prohibitions were.<sup>55</sup> City parks (especially their benches), promenades, museums, affluent neighborhoods: these were the cultural sites of the nation to which workers, without invitation, now traveled easily.<sup>56</sup> During suffrage demonstrations, using only one side of the street and letting traffic roll by unhindered on the opposite side was another mark of civility, leaving no cause for complaint. The conservative-nationalist *Tägliche Rundschau* wrote approvingly of one demonstration as exemplifying "Prussian militarism in civilian clothes."<sup>57</sup> Social Democrats leading the suffrage reform movement were eager to draw the connection between social maturity and political maturity. Well-organized, peaceful demonstrations, as distinct from earlier rebellions and tumults, were affirming characteristics of the new Social Democrat. He had already won his "political matriculation certificate"; therefore he also deserved the fair and equal vote.

Working-class protesters offered more than body language and gestures to make their point. They subjected symbols of authority (e.g. Dresden's Bismarck monument) to indignities large and small. They even compared—without equating—a parade-ground drill with a mass march.<sup>58</sup> One thing can be said with confidence: the theatricality of it all was not lost on either side.<sup>59</sup> In his memoirs, Otto Rühle, who stood on the far left of the Saxon SPD, offered a picture of one May Day demonstrator addressing the burghers looking down on him from windows and balconies. They were "full of anger" as they watched the masses march past. But the working-class demonstrators were numerically superior: "we embody so much power and courage!" If they wanted to, Rühle wrote, they could smash the bourgeois onlookers to a pulp. But "we still spare you, magnanimous and dignified as we are; our day has not yet come." This was not fantasy. For Social Democrats, the dignity and the seriousness of the performance demanded discipline. The liturgical elements drawn from nineteenth-century funeral processions had not been completely abandoned. But now the distinction between what was real and what was staged was deliberately blurred: the dress rehearsal was no longer for the first act alone.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., esp. 88. <sup>56</sup> On parks cf. Abrams, *Workers' Culture*, 158–63.

<sup>57</sup> 11.4.10, cited in Werneken, "Gewalt," 101.

<sup>58</sup> Comparing "*Gleichtritt*" and "*Massentritt*."

<sup>59</sup> For the following, Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*, 334; Werneken, "Gewalt," 107–14.

No corresponding subtlety is found in the situation reports of Saxon authorities in 1905. Police directors, military commanders, district administrators—they all expressed no understanding, let alone sympathy, for the larger goals toward which Social Democracy was working. When Regional Governor Georg von Welck—the old friend of Conservative leader Baron von Friesen-Rötha—reported from Chemnitz about suffrage demonstrations on 3 December 1905, it was self-evident to him that the state should react to this threat with the full force of its authority. “That thousands stream through the city to demonstrate politically, that they snarl traffic, disturb broad circles [of people], [and] try through their actions to exert a political form of pressure—this *cannot* be tolerated; if the relevant orders, demands, and warnings of the police are not heeded, if a kind of temporary elimination of police authority is threatened, then it must be preserved *by force*.”<sup>60</sup>

For some on the Right, suffrage demonstrations and their peaceful nature were cause for ridicule: they became almost banal. Using gendered notions of familiarity and routine to delegitimize workers’ demands for political inclusion, critics compared the Prussian suffrage demonstration in Treptow Park in 1910 to a family outing. Even the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* referred to the uniformity of the “every-year-yet-again” Women’s Day demonstrations, which allegedly achieved nothing.<sup>61</sup> But pessimists warned against being taken in by the Social Democrats’ stage management. One conservative deputy described suffrage demonstrations as “a *rehearsal* for the general exercise of raw violence.” Another described such protest as “much more than a military *review*. It [was] a maneuver, the training of the great mass for deployment in case things become serious. That [was] the principal idea underpinning the *staging* of such demonstrations.”<sup>62</sup>

#### EQUIPOISE?

The net result of Saxony’s flirtation with revolution in 1905 was ambiguous. In the short run, the end of bloodshed and the SPD’s disavowal of the mass strike allowed the majority parties in the Landtag to seize the initiative. Their utter loss of faith in Metzsch bore early fruit. On 30 April 1906 Metzsch resigned his ministerial posts and disappeared into obscurity.<sup>63</sup> The *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* was unsparing with its parting shots: Metzsch had been “tainted with the suffrage outrage [of 1896],” which was “mainly of his own making.” A “reactionary,” he had served as “policeman in the minister’s seat.”<sup>64</sup>

During the interval when the Landtag was not in session—May 1906 to October 1907—Saxon National Liberals demonstrated that they wanted to work with the Conservatives to devise a “safe” suffrage, despite their disagreements over many

<sup>60</sup> KHM Welck (Chemnitz) to MdI, 5.12.05, SHStAD, MdI 11043 (original emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> *VossZ*, 3.3.13, cited in Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*, 334.

<sup>62</sup> Von Brandenstein and Oktavio von Zedlitz-Neukirch, cited in Werneken, “Gewalt,” 108 (emphases added). Cf. *DTZ*, 3.11.08, on Saxon street demonstrations of 1.11.08.

<sup>63</sup> His new title as Minister of the Royal House was honorific.

<sup>64</sup> *SAZ* cited in Montgelas, 10.4.06, HHStAV, PAV/53.

subordinate issues.<sup>65</sup> At the time of the street protests in December 1905, many National Liberals had still been uncertain where the real enemy lay. Despite vigorous efforts, Gustav Stresemann could not sway the majority of National Liberals in the Landtag to support suffrage reform unreservedly. As a sympathetic editor put it in a note to Stresemann on 7 December 1905, the Social Democrats' use of violence was a two-edged sword. "The good opportunity to win popular support [for suffrage reform] must not slip away from us." However, the reaction of more cautious members of Stresemann's Association of Saxon Industrialists and of the Saxon National Liberal caucus would be pivotal. (The annual general meeting of the VSI was about to convene.)<sup>66</sup> "How they react in the next few days," continued this editor, "will show whether the uncommitted [members] of our party still want to press leftwards, since in Saxony it is not considered fair [*sic*] to be truly liberal."<sup>67</sup> Disappointed that Saxon businessmen deserted the reformist cause so quickly, Stresemann mainly avoided the suffrage issue in his public statements in 1906. But Hans Delbrück, writing in his *Preußische Jahrbücher*, pressed the point. Noting that National Liberals had lost precious time since 1903 in not pushing harder for suffrage reform, Delbrück reported that many Germans from the best circles now believed that neither the Prussian nor the Saxon government could have a clear conscience over the blood that had been spilled. According to Delbrück, the only solution was the introduction of plural voting for Landtag elections—in both states—as soon as possible.<sup>68</sup>

Haste could not be expected from Metzsch's successor. During Saxony's ministerial crisis of December 1905, Mehnert had written to Bülow that "right-thinking burghers of our land yearn for a *man*," one who "fearlessly and with clear vision will calmly follow the path dictated by present circumstances."<sup>69</sup> At the time, the Agrarian League's leading organ noted that Finance Minister Rüger was one statesman who had "strong nerves." It was also rumored that Mehnert himself might be appointed minister of the interior. However, insiders knew that Mehnert had no interest in such a position: he could exert more influence as leader of the anti-socialist Landtag majority.<sup>70</sup> Metzsch's successor, Count von Hohenthal und Bergen, was "dignified, insightful, trustworthy, and firm."<sup>71</sup> He had served as Saxon envoy in Berlin since 1885, and the conservative president of Saxony's upper chamber (Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt) was his brother-in-law. He even had qualities—"diplomacy, worldliness, etc."—that were conspicuously

<sup>65</sup> There is no need to repeat here the detailed discussion in Warren, *Kingdom*, 58–76.

<sup>66</sup> See Montgelaß (draft), 12.12.05, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963; Dönhoff, 1.7.05, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 20.

<sup>67</sup> H. A. Günther to Stresemann, 7.12.05, PAAAB, NL Stresemann, Nr. 3053, cited in Warren, *Kingdom*, 69f.

<sup>68</sup> *Prjbb* 123, no. 1 (Jan. 1906): 193–5; *ibid.* (28 Jan. 1906): 402–6.

<sup>69</sup> Mehnert to Bülow, 21.12.05 (copy), cited previously.

<sup>70</sup> Dönhoff, 22/23.12.05; Montgelaß, 13/25.1.06 (draft), cited previously, and for some of the following.

<sup>71</sup> Montgelaß, 13/25.1.06, 5.5.06 (drafts), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 964, and for the following citations.

lacking in the Saxon king. Friedrich August III had failed to inherit his uncle Albert's "clear-sightedness, cleverness, and decisiveness."

When Hohenthal delivered private remarks at a Berlin reception in March 1906, just before he departed for Dresden, he made two cardinal errors.<sup>72</sup> First, he dared to mention a future suffrage reform. "The principal task of my new post," he declared, "is to give the land a new suffrage which will guarantee even the working classes representation in the chamber but will not result in a flooding of the lower house by Social Democracy . . . I hope my plan, which already has found the general approval of the king, will appeal to the great majority of moderates, on whom the government must necessarily rely in a land as rich in industry as Saxony." Second, Hohenthal observed that Metzsch had laid down his post as a result of the street demonstrations of December 1905. For hardened policemen in Dresden and for die-hards in the Conservative camp, this candor flew in the face of their claim that the "power of the street" had remained in the hands of the state.<sup>73</sup> Socialists denounced Hohenthal's characterization of their street demonstrations, while Conservatives were worried that he had any reform plan at all.<sup>74</sup> Even Friedrich August III—who was otherwise "*feu et flamme*" for his new minister—labeled Hohenthal's remarks "not particularly felicitous."

From the time Hohenthal took office (1 May 1906) until he announced the government's new suffrage reform plan (7 July 1907), public opinion in Saxony simmered but did not boil over. In the ministry of the interior, Hohenthal's suffrage expert Georg Heink worked away on the details of the new proposal. Friedrich August III may have chosen Hohenthal for the wrong reasons. The king wanted to avoid any government legislation that might make him less loved by his subjects. But he also seemed to want Hohenthal to "enact a suffrage that corresponds more to the wishes of the radical parties, which, in His Highness's view, will increase or at least retain his popularity." The Prussian Dönhoff believed otherwise: any concession to the "revolutionaries" would be "more likely to weaken rather than strengthen the popularity of the king."<sup>75</sup>

Georg Heink continued Anselm Rumpelt's policy of communicating with his Prussian counterparts to compare suffrage reform plans. He was also reading reports from other German states about their own suffrage legislation—accompanied by reams of printed parliamentary debates.<sup>76</sup> The political press and the public were also eager to consider next steps. Against the backdrop of violence in December 1905, some wondered whether suffrage reform could ever bring social peace. Others concluded that Social Democracy had been dealt a telling blow. Still others took a position between these anxious and self-satisfied views. They hoped that a durable balance could be found between reform and repression; but their hopes had been dashed before.

<sup>72</sup> The reception was held on 26.3.06. Braun, 10.4.06, provided a close paraphrase of Hohenthal's remarks; HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>73</sup> Montgelas, 10.4.06 and 5.5.06, cited previously.

<sup>74</sup> Braun, 10.4.06, cited previously.

<sup>75</sup> Dönhoff, 3.1.06, cited previously.

<sup>76</sup> One wonders how much of this material could have been digested even by the "not unclever" Heink, let alone by Hohenthal. See materials in SHStAD, Mdl 5466 and Mdl 5425–6, Bde. 1–2.

When Hohenthal took over as Saxon government leader, he was happy to adopt the principle *quieta non movere*. Talk arose of convening a special session of the legislature to pass a suffrage bill, but he declared it out of the question. He would be crazy, he said, to convene parliament any sooner than necessary.<sup>77</sup> The magnitude of the task ahead was clear to Hohenthal. Within days of his appointment the new government leader was inquiring about recent suffrage developments in Switzerland. The Austrian envoy was sure that Hohenthal would have to “enter the arena” with a reform proposal: the “dance” would begin in the autumn of 1907 when the “Suffrage Reform Landtag *par excellence*” finally convened.<sup>78</sup>

Before he unveiled his suffrage reform plan of July 1907, Hohenthal needed less to soften up public opinion than to find common ground with the majority parties in the Landtag. He could not afford to disregard Saxony’s position, literally and politically, between southern and northern Germany. In January 1906, Conservatives in the Prussian House of Deputies challenged Bülow by asking him whether the government believed it was possible “successfully” to combat Social Democracy with existing laws. Bülow’s reply was full of fire and brimstone. But it elicited a sharp rejoinder from the *Badische Landeszeitung*, a National Liberal organ. Why should Bülow worry when other parties entered into election agreements with Social Democrats? this newspaper asked. The kind of Social Democrats the chancellor defamed in the Prussian Landtag were not the same Social Democrats one found in Baden: there, the SPD’s “reasonable” demands were greeted with “reasonable” responses, not “cannon and rifle shells.” When he read this, the Kaiser was livid. “Outrageous!” he wrote: “In Baden they seem to forget that they once had a revolution too. My grandfather had to march in, prop up the throne, and restore order. Should that happen again?”<sup>79</sup>

Saxons found themselves in a difficult position. They had little appetite for the way the Baden government dealt with the “reds”—whether through suffrage reform or welcoming their participation in legislation. But having just weathered the storm of violence in Dresden’s streets, their palate was too delicate for the Kaiser’s polemics. In a letter to Bulow on New Year’s Eve 1906, Wilhelm had rejected the possibility of war with France or Britain because the Social Democrats were “preaching and preparing for open rebellion.” As he famously wrote, “First fire on the socialists, decapitate [them] and render [them] harmless, if necessary by means of a bloodbath, and then war abroad. But not before . . .”<sup>80</sup> In Saxony, the enemies of Social Democracy had different priorities. They wanted to reverse the “shameful” outcome of the 1903 Reichstag elections. And they wanted to prevent passage of any genuinely transformative election law for their own Landtag.

<sup>77</sup> Braun, 17.5.06, also reports of 27.2.06, 10.4.06 (nos. 14B and 14C), HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>78</sup> For emphasis, the envoy wrote *par excellence* in Greek letters: *kat’ exochén*. Braun, 10.4.06, cited previously.

<sup>79</sup> Prussian envoy to Baden, Carl von Eisendecher, to Pr. FO, 27.1.06, with clipping of 26.1.06; PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bd. 20. Wilhelm II was referring to the future Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1849.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm to Bülow, Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 2:197f.; Lerman, *Chancellor*, 144; Röhl, *Wilhelm II.*, 3:459 (German ed.).

They could attain neither goal by threatening or decapitating Social Democrats. Their agenda would also be endangered if Friedrich August III or Hohenthal listened to the “radical parties” of the left. The situation called for tactical and strategic expertise, to be deployed with a light touch and brutal determination.

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Into the breach stepped Paul Mehnert. The moment he chose to do so was significant: 17 January 1907.<sup>81</sup> The Saxon Landtag was not in session, but a snap Reichstag election had been called four weeks earlier. Chancellor Bülow hoped to rally the “state-supporting parties” against the “black” (Catholic) and “red” enemies of the Reich and create a more reliable majority for legislation in the Reichstag. In mid-January 1907 Mehnert and Bülow were busy corresponding about Saxon constituencies that could be won back from the SPD. These circumstances make it all the more astounding that Mehnert sent a long memorandum to Berlin dealing *not* with the election campaign in progress but with the relatively dormant issue of suffrage reform. Mehnert’s memorandum was concise but crafted with great care. In both respects it demonstrated the power of “the authoritarian imagination”<sup>82</sup>—in Germany’s federal states, among the *Bürgertum*, and in the sphere of party politics.

Mehnert’s memorandum was conveyed to Bülow through Reich Chancellery Chief Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, who had formerly belonged to the national Conservative Party’s Committee of Eleven. Even in the heat of the election battle, Mehnert wanted to convince Bülow that any suffrage reform legislation in Saxony—no matter how carefully drawn up—would be a national calamity. In Mehnert’s eyes, Hohenthal’s rash promise “to give the land a new suffrage” was not merely unwelcome; it might undo everything socialism’s enemies had accomplished since they had suppressed violence in the streets of Dresden in December 1905.<sup>83</sup>

The Saxon king had told Mehnert over the Christmas holidays that a new suffrage bill was ready and had received royal approval. The king had said that he expected Saxon Conservatives to make the necessary sacrifices when the legislation reached the floor of the Landtag in November 1907. Mehnert’s arch-conservative ally in the state ministry, Finance Minister Rüger, had raised objections to the draft bill; in fact he had tendered his resignation over the issue. But the king expected Rüger to bow to the wishes of government leader Hohenthal and his suffrage expert Heink. That, for Mehnert, was the crux of the problem. He wanted to warn Bülow that Saxony’s suffrage bill had not been carefully crafted; rather, it had been prepared by men unfit for the task.

He first took aim at Heink, who, Bülow was told, had been a counselor in the interior ministry for “barely a year” and was “practically unacquainted with Saxony’s

<sup>81</sup> That is, just eight days before the main ballot in the Reichstag election (25.1.07).

<sup>82</sup> The reference is to the subtitle of Retallack, *German Right*.

<sup>83</sup> For the following, see the twelve-page typed memorandum (n.d.) with Mehnert’s standard coded signature “-ooOoo-” (original emphases), BAP, Rkz 1698; and Mehnert to Loebell, 17.1.07, BAP, Rkz 1796.

parliamentary circumstances." Heink was reputed to be "a not unclever man of action." But he "churned out much of his work 'off the cuff,' without deep or thorough understanding of the material and the relevant factors that must be considered." Heink's dilettantism in suffrage reform matters was all the more serious because Hohenthal had been in office only "a short time"—actually he had already served more than eight months—and didn't yet understand Saxon domestic politics. Because Hohenthal was often traveling with the king, he relied "almost entirely on the advice of his directors and counselors, among whom the younger ones appear to have more influence than the older gentlemen, who in a way represent the continuity of governance." For these reasons, Hohenthal's outlook on the next Landtag session was "*facile*"—"as though he imagined that he could accomplish a great deal through personal intervention." When Mehnert predicted that it would take Hohenthal years to understand the workings of the Landtag, the obvious implication was that he should not introduce a suffrage bill until he did.

Assuming that Bülow wanted to hear what he thought of other members of Saxony's state ministry, Mehnert noted the limited horizons of the ministers of justice and culture, adding that Minister of War Max von Hausen didn't much care about the suffrage issue either way. Why this peroration on second-tier ministers? Because Justice Minister Viktor von Otto and Culture Minister Joachim von Schlieben held the balance of power between Hohenthal and Rüger, at least if the suffrage legislation came to a vote within the state ministry.

Turning to what he had so far learned about the government's draft bill, Mehnert noted that it "follows a strong tendency toward the liberal side," in three respects: The three-class suffrage that was introduced "only in 1896" was to be done away with. So was the principle of dividing urban and rural constituencies. And the framers of the bill had returned to the idea that by admitting "close to 20 Social Democratic representatives" to the lower house, their entry would have a "conciliatory effect." Rebutting these false premises, Mehnert reminded Bülow that Saxony's suffrage laws of 1868 and 1896 had avoided the most plutocratic features of Prussia's three-class suffrage; that the division between cities and the countryside had been a principal feature of Saxony's constitution since its promulgation in 1831; and that he, Mehnert, could say "with absolute certainty" that the bill now being considered would not win even a simple majority.

According to Mehnert, the idea that admitting some Social Democrats to the Landtag would have a beneficial effect was a mistaken one. It could be traced back to Metzsch's unfortunate *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903, which in turn had been drafted—as though Bülow didn't know this already—under the influence of the SPD's election victory of June 1903. That SPD Landtag deputies would contribute to the "calming or satisfaction of the masses" was patently false, Mehnert claimed, and had grave implications. "Men of social reconciliation" were not what the Landtag or the Reichstag needed now.

Mehnert in January 1907 thus returned to a theme he had emphasized when reporting to Bülow about street tumults in December 1905. "The result of introducing a suffrage reform bill like the one described will have a very unfortunate effect not only on Saxony's internal affairs but outside Saxony too." As for his own



kingdom, Mehnert claimed that suffrage reform would precipitate “hard” and “sharp” conflicts between the government and the Landtag, with the upper house siding with the oppositional lower house. If the latter rejected the government’s bill “*with a strong majority*”—which could be expected—then the government would be forced to dissolve parliament. But elections would lead to a new parliament that would differ hardly at all from the present one. Saxony had not experienced a dissolution of parliament since the unfortunate year 1849—“warning enough” to those who believed that the “state-supporting parties” had to avoid whatever might divide them. At the present moment, nothing could be worse than a constitutional struggle between the “loyal parties” and the government. Such a struggle would benefit only Social Democracy, “giddy with delight.”

Mehnert understood that Bülow was concerned about the effect of a possible Saxon reform in other parts of Germany. “I often have the impression,” he wrote, “as though certain leading personalities see only with green-white blinkers,<sup>84</sup> as though they do not understand that any measure that affects the suffrage of an *individual German state must* also have consequences for other German states.” The southern German states did not pay enough attention to this obligation, Mehnert felt, or at least not in the appropriate “imperial sense.” Those states could follow their own path because they knew their reform would have little effect on Prussia’s election law. But Saxony enjoyed no such luxury: it had to be reckoned as a “*north-German state*.” To drive home his point, Mehnert noted that the Saxon suffrage of 1896 had been adopted “*only 10 years ago from Prussia*” [sic].

In his conclusion, Mehnert reiterated the point most likely to resonate with Bülow. “It can never be an inconsequential matter for the Kingdom of Prussia that the government of a neighboring state suddenly, after a trial period of ten years, throws overboard and completely abandons the suffrage it took from Prussia.” Such a decision would necessarily provide fuel for the suffrage reform movement in Prussia and could have “highly unfortunate consequences.” Mehnert fished for Bülow’s latest thoughts about possible future revisions to the Prussian suffrage, claiming to have learned that Bülow’s state ministry planned no fundamental change. However, he had heard “in strictest confidence” that Prussian Interior Minister Bethmann Hollweg had spoken favorably about the prospect of suffrage reform in Saxony and wished to implement a “corresponding suffrage revision” in Prussia soon. Unable to avoid a cloying tone, Mehnert expected that such a revision would not accord with the views of Prussia’s real “leadership”—Bülow himself.<sup>85</sup>

Mehnert’s views in January 1907—and the means by which he conveyed them—speak volumes. Election campaigns and suffrage reform were intimately linked. Saxon developments were seen as a crucial medium, or barrier, between political traditions and possibilities in Germany’s north and south. This bourgeois party leader mounted direct (and insidious) opposition to the state ministers who enjoyed the confidence of the Saxon crown. He also disparaged the technical ability and political acumen of the higher civil servants on whom those ministers relied.

<sup>84</sup> Green and white were Saxony’s dynastic colors.

<sup>85</sup> Preceding citations also from Mehnert’s memorandum [17.1.07], BAP, Rkz 1698.

For Mehnert, devotion to his “smaller homeland” and to the monarchical ideal was perfectly compatible with an appeal to Prussia that sought to undermine what remained of Saxony’s political autonomy. This memorandum also confirmed that Mehnert was just as conscious of his own power in 1907 as he had been in the late 1890s. One is tempted to say that his hubris was undiminished. However, he and his fellow Conservatives did not experience the tragic fate that hubris demands. In 1909 they reached agreement with Saxon National Liberals on a new suffrage that protected the Landtag from a Social Democratic “flood.” Mehnert’s elevation to Saxony’s upper chamber shortly thereafter reflected his own belief, and that of his king, that he had served his kingdom well.

### HOLDING THE LINE, JANUARY 1907

Anyone who had been presumptuous enough . . . to prophesize that the Reichstag elections in Saxony would result in the reduction of Social Democratic seats by more than half, would undoubtedly have been declared fit for the nut-house.

—Baron Karl von Braun to Austrian Foreign Office, February 1907<sup>86</sup>

Sometimes I wonder  
Just what am I fighting for?  
I win some battles  
But I always lose the war.

—song lyric, “There Must Be a Better World Somewhere” (1981)<sup>87</sup>

On the same day in early 1907, two events in Central Europe reflected the arrival of modern times—and the persistence of tradition.

In Vienna, Arnold Schoenberg’s *String Quartet No. 1* was performed for the first time in public. Schoenberg stuck with what he knew best. His *Quartet* used only four instruments and bore the key of D minor. It had only one movement. It nevertheless stretched the limits of tonality that had prevailed since the late Romantic era, and it was a step on the road to his revolutionary twelve-tone music. Schoenberg’s work offered a coherent narrative—what he called “musical prose.” This prose involved building up asymmetrical phrases into coherent “sentences.” According to one description, Schoenberg’s composition offered “a small collection of themes which appear again and again in many different guises.” Gustav Mahler found it difficult to deal with this unfamiliar style: “I have conducted the most difficult scores of Wagner; I have written complicated music

<sup>86</sup> Braun, 7.2.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>87</sup> By Doc Pomus (Jerome Solon Felder) and Mac Rebennack (Dr. John), recorded by B. B. King and others.

myself in scores of up to thirty staves and more; yet here is a score of not more than four staves, and I am unable to read them.”<sup>88</sup>

Also on 5 February 1907, run-off elections were held across Germany to determine the final results of a national campaign that had galvanized the German electorate as never before. On 13 December 1906, Chancellor Bülow had called a Reichstag election to defeat the parties that criticized German colonial policy most loudly: the Catholic Center Party and the Social Democrats. The SPD fared badly: its Reichstag caucus was cut almost in half. In Saxony, Social Democrats retained only eight of the twenty-two seats they had won in June 1903. “The Red Kingdom of Saxony has disappeared,” announced one nationalist newspaper: “from it a national land has emerged!”<sup>89</sup> Because Bülow’s election call was unexpected, all parties were caught unprepared and the campaign seemed uncommonly brief. Bülow’s gamble paid off handsomely: in February 1907 he reached the pinnacle of his career.

The most striking parallel between those two events was that Schoenberg and Bülow both offered their publics a coherent narrative with themes that appeared “again and again in many different guises.” Bülow stressed that German honor was threatened by the two opposition parties. But whether one is discussing a musical score or a political strategy, its coherence can be deceiving. In 1907, new styles of campaigning were built around uncomplicated slogans; yet they proved difficult for traditional party leaders like Paul Mehnert to decode, let alone conduct.

#### POLITICS IN A NEW KEY

The 1907 Reichstag elections have been characterized as a watershed in Germany’s political culture, but also as a curious interlude—a throwback to Bismarckian times.<sup>90</sup> According to one interpretation, the German Right was reshaped by the new, populist tone and the modern electioneering techniques of groups like the Imperial League against Social Democracy, the Navy League, the Protestant League, and the Pan-German League.<sup>91</sup> Another interpretation holds that these nationalist associations, although influential in 1907, played (at best) a minor role in the Reichstag elections of 1903 and 1912.<sup>92</sup> Each of these contrasting views has merit. The Saxon case shows why.<sup>93</sup>

The tone and tempo of modern politics worried some defenders of the authoritarian state. It heartened and energized others. After 1903, both groups wondered whether the state had the resolve to engage and defeat the forces of revolution. Ernst von Heydebrand was not speaking only for Prussian Conservatives when he saw the writing on the wall after the Reichstag election of June 1903. Heydebrand blamed “the completely passive Reich government, which mindlessly and passively confronts [a] development . . . [that is] horrifyingly similar to the era before the

<sup>88</sup> See Frisch, *Works*, 181–219; also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String\\_quartets\\_\(Schoenberg\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_quartets_(Schoenberg)) (accessed 2 August 2016).

<sup>89</sup> Braun, 28.1.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>90</sup> Sperber, *Voters*, 247, 252f.; Nonn, *Verbraucherprotest*, 220–9.

<sup>91</sup> Eley, *German Right*.

<sup>92</sup> Griefmer, *Massenverbände*.

<sup>93</sup> To chronicle the rise of a nationalist opposition and other extra-parliamentary groups in Saxony would explode the bounds of this chapter.

great French Revolution.”<sup>94</sup> Such statements—and the broader evolution of the German Right—undermine claims that the established parties played a minor role in the emergence of a nationalist opposition after 1903. The Kaiser’s friend Philipp Eulenburg also spoke for others on the Right when he considered the implications of the 1903 elections. The only way out of the crisis was for Germany’s elite to widen its social basis: it had to reach out a hand to the “*Nichtsatisfaktionsfähigen*”—those who are not worthy to duel. It also had to “set *all* forces in the service of the social order and state” (see Figure 10.1 for a skeptical view of the Agrarian League’s ability to muster mass support among voters).

Although neither Heydebrand nor Eulenburg was capable of reaching out in this way, others on the Right were. These included General Eduard von Liebert, founder of the Imperial League against Social Democracy. Liebert’s combination of elite status, national achievement, and populist touch produced amazement in Saxony, where he ran as a Free Conservative in 1907, and across the Reich. The *Bochumer Anzeiger* described a speech by Liebert and expressed surprise that such a man should be called upon to present his credentials to the voting public in the age of universal suffrage: “A general, an excellency, as agitator at the speakers’ podium, one of the upper ten thousand, one of the privileged, one of the truly best of the nation, an old officer, a proven knight, burned by the blazing heat of the sun in the service of the Fatherland, a man who in truth has no reason to toil as a traveling speaker—has the world really changed so much?”<sup>95</sup> Even as Germany’s *social* democratization quickened, the extra-parliamentary groups on the right who benefited from this development helped the established parties slow or stop its *political* democratization. The existing social order could not be preserved, but the authoritarian state could.

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Six days after Bülow dissolved the Reichstag, he received a memorandum from his chancellery chief Loebell (also a founding member of the Imperial League Against Social Democracy). Loebell had just discussed the prospects for anti-socialist solidarity in different parts of Germany with Ernst Bassermann, leader of the National Liberal Party. He reported to Bülow that “the Kingdom of Saxony will more or less decide the outcome of the elections.” “Everything depends on things being planned properly there.” Loebell had already begun the planning himself. “The draft of a letter to Count Vitzthum will be prepared for you by day’s end,” he reported to Bülow, adding: “Perhaps it would also be a good idea if I personally contacted Herr Mehnert, whom I have known for a long time, and other gentlemen in Dresden.”<sup>96</sup> Loebell was true to his word. A letter went out that day to “my dear Friedrich”—Count Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt, president of Saxony’s upper chamber.<sup>97</sup> Bülow underscored the sentiment voiced by Bassermann and

<sup>94</sup> Heydebrand and Eulenburg, both 1903, cited in Saul, *Staat*, 13 (emphasis added).

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Griesmer, *Massenverbände*, 79.

<sup>96</sup> Memo, Loebell to Bülow, 19.12.06, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 18.

<sup>97</sup> Recall that he had helped Bülow persuade government leader Metzsch to remain at his post in December 1905.

## Der Agrarier

(Zeichnung von E. Thöny)



„Sehr verehrte Anwesende! Meine Herren . . .“ — „Häße gehört? Sonst red' er per Schweinehunde.“

**Figure 10.1.** “The Agrarian.” The caption reads: “‘Very honorable listeners! Gentlemen . . .’ ‘Did you hear that? Otherwise he talks of *Schweinehunde*.’”

Source: “Der Agrarier,” by Eduard Thöny, *Simplicissimus* 8, Nr. 53, Extra-Nummer, Reichstagswahl (1903–04): 12. *Simplicissimus* Online: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

Loebell: "The Social Democratic caucus owes its dominance in the Reichstag above all to its election victories in the Kingdom of Saxony."<sup>98</sup> Another observer defined dominance more precisely: one-quarter of the SPD's Reichstag caucus represented Saxon constituencies.<sup>99</sup>

Scholars are familiar with the national contours of the 1907 Reichstag campaign and the scale of propaganda distributed by political parties and nationalist associations before, during, and after the elections.<sup>100</sup> This section considers three more specific topics. First, it examines what party leaders, statesmen, and civil servants thought was happening during the campaign in Saxony—and what *should* happen. Second, it examines the breadth and diversity of the groups that fought to defeat Social Democracy. Personalities and local circumstances helped determine whether a left liberal or an antisemite or a *Mittelständler* might do better against a Social Democrat than a Conservative or National Liberal would. But such diversity often surrendered seats that unity might have won. Third, the 1907 elections affected the fate of Saxon suffrage reform. After the final election results were known on 5 February 1907, the "state-supporting" parties were jubilant. But they did not all take away the same political lessons from the hard-fought campaign. Would the enemies of Social Democracy decode the enigma of suffrage reform to produce a new score—anti-socialism in a new key, perhaps? Suffrage reform in Saxony remained on the agenda after January 1907, but the political context in which it was contested had been transformed.

#### "WHAT MAKES THE HOTTENTOT SO HOT?"

Perceptions matter. The timing and tempo of the 1907 campaign were not perceived the same way even among those fighting on the nationalist side. Some observers thought agitation on behalf of king and country started belatedly and unfolded too slowly.<sup>101</sup> At the end of December 1906, the regional governor in Chemnitz complained that "the Conservatives, as always, are slow, and long-winded in their newspaper articles, etc., and lack stirring phrases; apparently they have also let themselves be over-awed by the first battle-cry, 'Against the Center and Social Democracy.'"<sup>102</sup> Others pointed to quiet corners of the kingdom, where no

<sup>98</sup> Bülow to Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt, 19.12.06 (draft), BAP, Rkz 1794.

<sup>99</sup> Braun, 9.1.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>100</sup> Start with Crothers, *Elections*, and Griefsmer, *Massenverbände*.

<sup>101</sup> Since 1904 German colonial soldiers had been engaged in a genocidal war against the Herero and Nama peoples in German South-West Africa (now Namibia). Europeans commonly referred to these groups as "Hottentots." Because the Catholic Center and the Social Democratic parties attacked Chancellor Bülow's colonial policy and prompted his dissolution of the Reichstag in December 1906, the January 1907 election became known as the "Hottentot election." From *The Wizard of Oz*: "Cowardly Lion: What makes a king out of a slave? Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage! . . . What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the 'ape' in apricot? What have they got that I ain't got? Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman: Courage!"

<sup>102</sup> KHM Curt von Burgsdorff (Chemnitz), 30.12.06, SHStAD, Mdi 5389. This report concerned Saxon constituencies 15–21, where only Oswald Zimmermann (AS) and Gustav Stresemann (NLP) prevented the SPD winning a solid block of seven seats. Burgsdorff predicted that Saxony would return as many Social Democratic deputies to the Reichstag as it had in 1903.

party found much traction or where one party's victory seemed preordained. Löbau's district governor Walter von Pflugk put it this way: "Besides Social Democracy, none of the parties of order has done anything at all to prepare for the Reichstag elections originally scheduled for 1908." He was also appalled by the stinginess of the pro-government parties. "Every year, Social Democratic workers pay up to 40 Marks and more for their party, without receiving in return any tangible benefits." Pflugk therefore found it "shameful" that local branches of the "state-supporting" parties were having difficulty getting their members to agree to raise their annual fee from four to five Pfennigs, "as recently happened in the District Association of Veterans' Clubs here."<sup>103</sup>

Still others perceived developments racing ahead of them—under control or not. On the day the Reichstag was dissolved, Bülow asked the Prussian ultra-Conservative Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau how he thought the election would turn out: "You can be sure of this," Oldenburg replied confidently: "if the Prussian gets a tug at the reins, his tail goes up in the air!"<sup>104</sup> In Saxony, Hohenthal was less sanguine. In mid-January 1907 he urged Bülow to do more to connect two narratives: Germany's struggle against "inner enemies" and its need to project strength and resolve to other Great Powers. "The German *Spießbürger* is roused from his apathy only if he knows it could be his neck on the line; therefore it is impossible to emphasize too strongly that . . . the voter who casts a ballot against Social Democracy increases the chances of peace *abroad*." German burghers, Hohenthal believed, could not afford to play the role of "naïve simpletons" lured by the siren song of Social Democratic pacifism.<sup>105</sup>

The urgency of the matter was recognized in the Reich chancellery, although Bülow waited too long to play his best cards.<sup>106</sup> One of his first acts was to call in the help of Ludwig Asch to coordinate the government's campaign. Asch was chief editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Berlin. Loebell recommended him as an "extremely talented worker," someone "with original ideas," and "very experienced in election campaigns."<sup>107</sup> Asch lived up to his billing. The day after parliament was dissolved, he delivered to the chancellor a long memorandum entitled "Proposals for Leading the Election Battle by the Government."<sup>108</sup> Asch's opening paragraph explained what was at stake in 1907. In the two previous elections of 1898 and 1903, it was the *parties* that experienced victories or defeats: this time the *government* would win

<sup>103</sup> AHM Pflugk (Löbau), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906" (excerpt), SHStAD, Mdi 5390.

<sup>104</sup> Oldenburg-Januschau, *Erinnerungen*, 87, cited in Fricke, "Regierungswahlkampf," 485.

<sup>105</sup> His term was "*blinde Schalmeyenbläser*." Hohenthal to Bülow, 14.1.07, BAP, Rkz 1795 (original emphasis).

<sup>106</sup> *Sylvesterbrief* (31.12.06) to the RvgSD and speech to the *Kolonialpolitische Aktionskomitee* (19.1.07), Bülow, *Reden*, 2:451–5; 3:233–40. For the former see "Reich Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow's 'New Year's Eve Letter' (31 December 1906)," GHDI vol. 5, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=764](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=764).

<sup>107</sup> Loebell to RFKP leader Zedlitz-Neukirch, 3.1.07, BAP, Rkz 1795.

<sup>108</sup> "Vorschläge zur Führung des Wahlkampfes durch die Regierung," 14.12.06 (copy), BAP, Rkz 1794. Original in PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 18 (original emphasis). Excerpts in Fricke, "Regierungskampf."

or lose, and for that reason it had to wage the campaign “on the *offensive*.”<sup>109</sup> Asch’s subsequent suggestions were greeted with enthusiasm by Bülow and passed along to other authorities. They illustrate that outsiders—“free-booters” and demagogues—were not the only ones who lent a rougher tone to German politics. Asch was an experienced insider: but he was no less impatient with the staid campaign practices of yesteryear, no less cynical in seeking popularity among the masses, no less convinced that the patriotic message had to be heard in the smallest rural village. In retrospective accounts of the 1907 campaign published by the Imperial League Against Social Democracy<sup>110</sup> and the Dresden chapter of the Pan-German League,<sup>111</sup> one finds almost nothing in the arsenal of modern politics that Asch had not already recommended to Bülow on Day 2 of the campaign.

What mattered was implementation. These two organizations could justifiably claim credit for some of the intensive political fieldwork that helped wrest thirteen Saxon constituencies from the Social Democrats. In today’s baseball parlance, they were very good at playing “small ball”—taking care of the little things that chalk up a victory.<sup>112</sup> In the case of the Dresden Pan-Germans, these things included staging slide-shows on colonial themes<sup>113</sup> and recruiting the Saxon Automobile Club to help *Schlepper* get pro-government voters to the polls. The baseball analogy doesn’t work perfectly, though. In every Saxon constituency where the Imperial League supported an anti-socialist candidate, there were two, three, or four teams on the field, playing for the same side but tripping over each other. And the Pan-German streak did not last: the Dresden chapter was unable to build on its achievement after 1907.

Finding suitable candidates was the first task that demonstrated important differences of opinion about how the campaign should evolve. It was also a task that underwent metamorphosis between the beginning and end of active campaigning. Asch, Loebell, Bülow, and others believed that a single candidate acceptable to all non-socialist parties should be identified by some central authority and anointed as the “national” candidate as quickly as possible. If the government hesitated, Asch wrote, local and regional party leaders would rush in to fill the political vacuum. This would preclude the possibility of agreement on a single candidate, let alone the best candidate. When Asch delivered a second long memorandum to the chancellery a few days later, he acknowledged that it was already too late to implement this strategy, even in the most promising constituencies on which he had focused Bülow’s attention.<sup>114</sup> Bickering was rife among the national parties and multiple candidacies were popping up frequently.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Hohenthal’s remarks cited in Braun, 28.1.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>110</sup> Reichsverband gegen die Sozialdemokratie, *10 Jahre*; idem, *Reichsverband . . . 1907* (esp. 22–5 on Saxony); idem, *Handbuch*, 2nd ed.; Wegener, *Politik*, esp. 74–84.

<sup>111</sup> See Kolditz, “Rolle,” 225–30, which draws on Ortsgruppe Dresden des ADV, *Jahresbericht . . . (1906/07)*, 22–6; *Wahlkampf in Dresden*; and Friedrich Eugen Hopf to Bülow, 6.12.07, BAP, Rkz 1799.

<sup>112</sup> The contemporary term was “*Kleinarbeit*.”

<sup>113</sup> These and other events sponsored by the *Dresdner Nationaler Ausschuß* (12.1.–23.1.07) are listed in StadtAD, PA, 231.01, ADV, Nr. 33.

<sup>114</sup> Asch, “Bemerkungen zur Wahlagitiation,” 19.12.06; BAP, Rkz 1794.



Sometimes haste was equated with nationalist fervor. A circular inviting members of Dresden's National Committee to a meeting on 22 December was typical in this regard. "The pressure of time is extraordinary; Social Democracy stands there armed and ready for battle, its wonderfully organized party has already begun to fight . . . The Reich is in danger! The enemy is strong! The time to prepare for battle is short!"<sup>115</sup> Yet Mehnert confirmed Asch's assessment that the parties would use the available time to nominate their own favorite candidates. On 4 January 1907—roughly half-way through the campaign—Mehnert had just wound up the difficult business of sorting out candidate questions in Saxony. But he was part of the problem, not the solution. Like other party leaders in Saxony, he expended considerable time and energy trying to balance his own party's interests with the need to present a united front. This balancing act was precarious: if it held in December here, it might collapse in January there. The "united phalanx" that Asch cited in his memorandum of 14 December 1906 was chimerical—even in Saxony, where the stakes were so high.<sup>116</sup>

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Saxony's "parties of order" also drew up a battle plan that seemed to offer a formula for success—if only it had been followed more closely. The victories scored by anti-socialists in Saxony were often won *in spite of* this plan. It had three parts.

First, Conservatives, National Liberals, and the Radical Party whipped up anti-Catholic sentiment. Here the liberal parties took the lead, just as they had during the *Kulturkampf*. They used the Center's opposition to colonial spending as a pretext to set the agenda of the campaign nationally. The commentary of the *Dortmunder Anzeiger* was typical of other liberal pronouncements: "May a whiff of Luther's anger and Luther's courage run through our nation!"<sup>117</sup> But anti-Catholicism, however important it might be to the Protestant League and liberals, was a means to an end in Saxony. Because the kingdom's population was overwhelmingly Protestant, everyone knew the Center Party would draw few votes in Saxony, even though the government's chief critic in the Reichstag, Matthias Erzberger, was a Center candidate in all twenty-three constituencies. The Saxon parties attacked the Center anyway, not in its own right but because it was allegedly allied with Social Democracy. The powerful Saxon branch of the Protestant League echoed this argument: "Saxons! You have proved yourself so often as lynchpins of the German Reich. Defend its future now! No one who is a lackey of the Center, no one who is closed to German patriotism, should enter the Reichstag from our land."<sup>118</sup>

Second, Conservative and National Liberal newspapers announced "upon reliable authority" that the government had a new suffrage reform proposal that was

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Kolditz, "Rolle," 225.

<sup>116</sup> Asch to Rkz, 14.12.06, cited previously: this "*geschlossene Phalanx*" was to reach from the BdL and Conservatives on the right to the South German *Volkspartei* on the left.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Sperber, *Voters*, 246; cf. Becker, "Kulturkampf"; Smith, *Nationalism*, 141–6.

<sup>118</sup> *Sächs. Landesverein* of the Protestant League, election flyer, StadtAD, PA, 231.01, ADV, Nr. 33.

almost ready to present to the Landtag. This claim was only half-true. But the “parties of order” were determined to avoid what Mehnert had identified (for Bülow) as the greatest mistake of the 1903 Reichstag campaign: government leader Metzsch’s failure to tell Saxon voters that he was working on a suffrage reform plan. Given that Mehnert in January 1907 was begging Bülow to *halt* Hohenthal’s reform plan, this tactic was less ironic than mendacious.

Third, the “state-supporting” parties played the national card as aggressively as possible. They labeled as unpatriotic any attack on the government for its mismanagement of colonial affairs. They defended the army’s brutal war against the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa (in effect, labeling Germany’s first genocide as little more than collateral damage). And they did their best to refute SPD propaganda about the millions of Marks spent on the army, navy, and German colonies. In these ways, the lines between nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism virtually disappeared. Germany’s prospects of growing from a European power to a world power depended on defending its “national honor.”

No stone was left unturned to avoid competing candidacies between Conservatives and National Liberals in Saxony, even though, formally, the Kartell of 1903 no longer existed. Through Loebell and Mehnert, Bülow intervened whenever his support might help achieve a respectable outcome. But Saxony’s Conservatives and National Liberals were even more ambitious. On a national scale they wanted to resurrect Saxony’s role as an exemplar of anti-socialist unity and thus reverse the calamity of June 1903. If they succeeded in this task, they would then have a better chance of achieving their second, more modest objective: negotiating a suffrage reform palatable to both parties. Already in 1907 they envisioned a suffrage reform that offered no tangible concessions to socialism and only cosmetic ones to democracy. These goals were linked. If a suitably cautious suffrage reform could be negotiated in the Saxon Landtag, the “red kingdom” might actually stem the democratic tide creeping upward from southern Germany. That achievement, too, would deserve national acclaim.

As soon as the election campaign began, the Saxon parties struck alliances to defeat Social Democracy. The National Liberals promised to support Conservative candidates in four constituencies.<sup>119</sup> The Conservatives reciprocated in six constituencies.<sup>120</sup> Both parties promised to support the antisemitic German Reform leader Oswald Zimmermann in 20: Marienberg. What were all these candidates fighting for? Their respective parties and platforms, of course. Were they also fighting on behalf of the government? Chancellor Bülow wanted to see it that way. But in a circular sent to its members in early January 1907, the executive of the Pan-German League’s Dresden chapter was less certain about who was leading whom: “The reason for the dissolution of the Reichstag is a proud gratification for us Pan-Germans. At last the Reich government begins to walk in the paths our appeals had been showing them for years. Now the call is: ‘All men on deck!’

<sup>119</sup> In Saxony 8, 9, 14, 19. Alliances and some statistics from RHRT, 2:1120–1197, here 2:1122.

<sup>120</sup> In Saxony 2, 6, 12, 13, 17, and 22.

‘Weapons at the ready!’ Let us join in, in strong support, for the demands of a government made stronger!”<sup>121</sup>

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The contest in 14: Borna demonstrated that slogans did not suffice to carry the day.<sup>122</sup> The Imperial League’s chairman Eduard von Liebert “should” have been given a clear field to try to win the seat back from the SPD. But as soon as the election was announced, Curt Fritzsche, a businessman and small farmer, threw his hat into the ring.<sup>123</sup> He was one of five antisemitic candidates running for the Reform Party in Saxony.<sup>124</sup> After the Conservatives nominated Liebert, they put pressure on Fritzsche to stand down. He refused. Fritzsche successfully withstood the efforts of Mehnert and the Navy League’s August Keim to help Liebert, who complained that Fritzsche’s rival candidacy “is becoming more and more uncomfortable [and] is exciting the small, right-thinking people demagogically.”<sup>125</sup> Fritzsche boldly wrote in person to Bülow, complaining that the chancellor’s famous New Year’s Eve Letter<sup>126</sup> to Liebert signified official interference in the election. He promised to do everything in his power to help defeat Liebert if he reached the run-off election, and he even threatened a protest to the Reichstag’s Election Oversight Committee if either Liebert or the Social Democrat won.<sup>127</sup>

Mehnert’s response? “This man’s [Fritzsche’s] inferiority of national spirit,” he wrote, “could hardly be more clearly demonstrated.” Mehnert added that Fritzsche “had worked the constituency for himself for more than a year in a *strongly demagogic* fashion.” When he read this, Bülow asked in exasperation why “such a scandal” could not be “shut down” by the leader of the antisemitic German Social Party, Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg. Liebert had already asked whether the Saxon *Mittelstand* Union and the Reform Party could be prevailed upon to withdraw Fritzsche’s candidacy. Liebermann’s influence over Saxon Reformers had evaporated long before. But we have to look deeper to understand why Mehnert’s efforts on Liebert’s behalf also failed.

“National spirit,” like anti-socialist solidarity, lay in the eye of the beholder. The district and regional governors who reported on this contest paid more than grudging respect to Fritzsche’s careful cultivation of the local electorate. He had been meeting local groups, raising money, and giving speeches in the constituency

<sup>121</sup> StadtAD, PA, 231.01, ADV, Nr. 33, n.d. [Jan. 1907].

<sup>122</sup> For the following: Fritzsche to Bülow, 3.1.07, and draft reply from Loebell, n.d.; Vitzthum to Bülow, 5.1.07; Mehnert to Rkz, 4.1.07; all in BAP, Rkz 1795; AHMS Rochlitz, 24.12.06; AHMS Borna, 3.1.07; and other reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5389.

<sup>123</sup> Not to be confused with the more prominent antisemite Theodor Fritsch, first profiled in ch. 5.

<sup>124</sup> On Fritzsche and other AS in 1907, PAS, 157–60. The DRP fielded fourteen candidates in the Reich. Liebermann von Sonnenberg’s DSP, allied with the CSP and BdL, tripled its RT seats from 1903 (three to nine); they now represented almost half the WV’s nineteen seats.

<sup>125</sup> Liebert telegram to Keim, 20.1.07; cf. Loebell to Mehnert, 21.1.07 (draft); and Mehnert to Loebell, 23.1.07; BAP, Rkz 1807.

<sup>126</sup> Cited previously. Cf. the heavily edited draft (n.d.) in BAP, Rkz 1794.

<sup>127</sup> Claiming that Bülow’s *Sylvesterbrief* to Liebert represented a personal intervention in this constituency.

for more than *three* years, they reported. The Saxon *Mittelstand* Union, even though it stood under the nominal influence of Mehnert—via the antisemitic Theodor Fritsch, the Union's chairman, and Ludwig Fahrenbach, its general secretary—sat on the fence. It refused to endorse either Fritzsche or Liebert. Fahrenbach had begun criticizing the Reformers openly in mid-1906, yet the antisemites had always been attentive to *Mittelstand* grievances, which played an important part in this contest. The strategy adopted by the local SPD organization made Liebert's task even harder: it tried to make it seem "as though its political outlook differs only a little from that of the parties of order, especially the Reformers."<sup>128</sup> Adding to the confusion, left liberals in 14: Borna continued to toy with the idea of nominating their own candidate.

Mehnert's best-case scenario was that the *Mittelstand* Union would give its supporters a free hand. Mehnert was impressed by the money and the speakers the Imperial League Against Social Democracy was pouring into Liebert's campaign. But he wanted Bülow to know that the League's activities were not well-received everywhere. "The functionaries of the Imperial League . . . have not exactly been deployed successfully in the election campaign in Saxony."<sup>129</sup> After the by-election in 10: Döbeln the previous October, when the Pan-German leader Ernst Hasse lost to a Social Democrat, Mehnert had received "strong complaints about the inferiority of the Imperial League's speakers."

The election in 14: Borna found the "parties of order" disunited. Fritzsche forced Liebert into an unwelcome run-off election against a Social Democrat.<sup>130</sup> Thus two more costly weeks of campaigning were required before Liebert won the run-off, with almost 57 percent of the vote. Tellingly, only one more vote was cast in the run-off than in the main election: run-offs elsewhere almost always produced higher turnouts. Liebert and Fritzsche had apparently disenchanted enough nationalist voters that many of them stayed home on 5 February. Nationalists grumbled that Liebert's victory should never have been in doubt.

The fog of war affected what nationalist leaders *thought* should happen in another way. When the election campaign began, general agreement prevailed among Asch, Bülow, Mehnert, and other party leaders: a single nationalist candidate should be nominated in every possible constituency.<sup>131</sup> But Conservatives, National Liberals, and left liberals in the Saxon countryside "started shooting at each other." They paid scant attention to the Reich government's appraisal of which party stood the best chance in winnable constituencies. So Asch revised his formula for success. He began to pay more attention to the political profile of individual constituencies. For example, a Conservative had to be nominated in 2: Löbau because it was one of the few Saxon ridings with a relatively high proportion of large agricultural estates. Victory was possible in 7: Meißen, 8: Pirna, and 9: Freiberg only if the parties agreed to nominate an antisemite, a Conservative, and a

<sup>128</sup> AHMS Borna, 3.1.07, cited previously.

<sup>129</sup> Mehnert to Bülow, 4.1.07, cited previously.

<sup>130</sup> They won 18.7 percent, 42.6 percent, and 38.7 percent of the vote, respectively.

<sup>131</sup> Asch to Bülow, 14.12.06, cited previously.

National Liberal, respectively. Referring to these three ridings, Asch preferred to look on the bright side: "here, as in many other Saxon constituencies, the strong advance shown by Social Democracy in 1903 need not be discouraging." In June 1903, the "sad affair at the Saxon court"—the Crown Princess's flight from Dresden with her lover in late 1902—had "delivered tens of thousands of votes to the Social Democrats." Asch leaned further to the side of over-confidence when he reported on prospects in 11: Oschatz-Grimma. "This constituency has such a large rural population that its reconquest must easily be possible." Tortuous negotiations among competing *bürgerlich* parties in this riding proved that was easier said than done.<sup>132</sup>

Others observers felt that Asch was too optimistic. Dresden Regional Governor Rumpelt reported retrospectively that in mid-December 1906, some supporters of the government hoped that Freiberg might be taken back from the SPD; but there was "little prospect" of that happening in Pirna, and one "hardly dared to think of a victory in Meißen" except as the "boldest fantasy."<sup>133</sup> That fantasy emboldened the Pan-German Ernst Hasse to accept the nomination in 11: Oschatz-Grimma, offered to him by the Saxon National Liberals' top leadership. But the Conservatives and the Agrarian League refused to support this "rival." First they disparaged Hasse's electability. They claimed that "in the countryside, one knows of Professor Dr. Hasse only that he lost in Leipzig [in June 1903], lost in Döbeln [in October 1906], and will likely lose once again here too." The National Liberals dropped Hasse unceremoniously and nominated the left-leaning factory owner Max Langhammer. This was someone Mehnert knew well from the Landtag. Mehnert regarded him, like Gustav Stresemann, as an "extreme" candidate and therefore unwelcome. Shortly before the main ballot the Conservatives settled on Dr. Ernst Giese as their man. On polling day the "parties of order" were disunited here too. But in the run-off ballot, again the nationalist cause prevailed, with Giese gaining almost 58 percent of the popular vote.

Although Asch continued to revise his tactics, he also persisted in his belief that regional party leaders or their central election committees in Berlin should exert their influence to keep local activists "on message." He listed three ways they could do this. (1) Party leaders should provide only anti-socialist and anti-Catholic flyers to their local election committees. (2) They should keep a tight hold on their party's purse-strings and provide funding to local committees only if they adopted a "reasonable stance" toward the other pro-government parties.<sup>134</sup> And (3) they should approve paid speakers for the grass-roots campaigns only if they pledged "to leave aside any hateful polemics against the parties of the new Kartell." "In this manner it is at least possible to fashion a loose Kartell that offers the individual parties enough room to maneuver [and that] can function successfully in the

<sup>132</sup> Besides Mehnert's reports of 4/19.1.07, see Griefsmer, *Massenverbände*, 134, citing the *LVZ*, 22/24/27.12.06; RHRT, 2:1157f.

<sup>133</sup> KHM Rumpelt (Dresden), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906" (excerpt), SHStAD, Mdl 5390.

<sup>134</sup> As head of the *Komite Patria*, the RFKP leader Zedlitz-Neukirch followed Asch's advice. Zedlitz to Bülow, 19.12.06, BAP, Rkz 1794; excerpts in Fricke, "Regierungswahlkampf"; Fricke, ed., *Dokumente*, 2:64f.

run-off elections." Since Asch expected the 1907 elections to produce "considerably more than 100 run-offs," these second ballots would produce "the real decision about the composition of the new Reichstag."

When Mehnert updated Bülow on 4 January 1907, he wrote that he had followed his original strategy. "My effort in conducting election preparations has been to make the initial attempt to unite the nationalist electorate, as far as possible, behind one candidate." However, by that time Mehnert's battle plan was in tatters. So he tried to make the best of things. Like Hohenthal, who had invoked the old idea of "marching separately, striking together," he changed course.<sup>135</sup> His reasoning went like this: More nationalist voters would turn out for the main ballot—and thus presumably for the run-off as well—if they had the opportunity to choose from a number of non-socialist candidates in the first round. In this way the "parties of order" could mobilize members of the electorate, especially from the middle and upper classes. These were voters who, "if they could not cast their ballot for their special candidate at least in the main election," would stay home.

Even though Asch and Mehnert warmed slowly to the idea of fielding multiple nationalist candidates for the first ballot, anti-socialist disunity hampered the nationalist cause in nine of twenty-three Saxon constituencies.<sup>136</sup> This figure is remarkably close to the level of anti-socialist disunity found in previous Reichstag elections. But in 1907, those nine instances of anti-socialist disunity led to only two SPD victories. In both cases—4: Dresden-New City and 6: Dresden-County—the socialists won the seat on the first ballot. As a corollary to this, the anti-socialist parties had previously allowed themselves the luxury of competing candidacies mainly in unwinnable ridings: the heavily industrialized, "bomb-proof" constituencies (Saxony 15–21) where Social Democratic victories had to be expected. In 1907, however, the "parties of order" generally offered up only one sacrificial lamb in these SPD bastions; anti-socialist disunity was more frequent in hotly-contested constituencies. Therein lay a danger significant enough that it would have been seen as a strategic error—if the "parties of order" had done poorly in 1907. But they did very well.

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In 1907, the non-voter was on everyone's lips. He had caused the "bad" Reichstag elections of 1903. What to do? Again the answer lay in "small ball"—doing the little things, taking care of business, to bring nationalist voters to the polls. One way to do so was to reorient pro-government propaganda. It had to reach as many nationalist voters as possible.

Ludwig Asch knew the government had to work hand in glove with the "parties of order" to achieve success with their printed propaganda. Even the smallest district gazette, he wrote, had to join the battle openly. Like the local civil servants who often served as their editors, these gazettes should "pay no attention to all the

<sup>135</sup> Braun, 9.1.07, HHStAV, PAV/53, and for the following comment about "their special candidate."

<sup>136</sup> Saxony 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 21, 23.

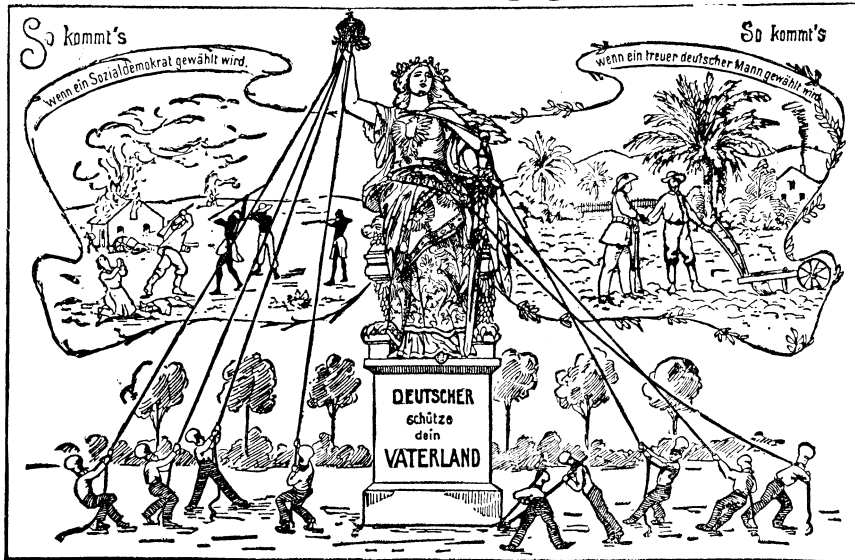
clamor about electoral manipulation and the like.” No longer could the government rely on the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* to get the message out. The mass of voters, owing to a “hereditary German peculiarity,” were suspicious of any news item published there. Instead voters had to be educated by news items sent “under a cover address.” Subterfuge and a break with past traditions were also Asch’s remedy to the ineffective use of electoral flyers. “In 1893,” he wrote, “the writings of Major Keim were circulated by the government after the dissolution of the Reichstag”; but they had “rotted by the tens of thousands in some district administrators’ attics.” The “state-supporting” parties were not organized well enough to overcome this obstacle. It is not clear whether Asch believed the nationalist associations were organized well enough either. In any case, the flyers had to be “offered directly to the candidates themselves, again by a fictitious committee.”

The importance of local, mass-based campaigning was evident to Asch when he offered advice about the flyers and other publications that might sway the “little man” during the campaign (“educated voters,” he wrote, never pay attention to them). It was important not to adopt a childlike tone in such printed propaganda, but it was just as important to include “no numbers.” Instead pro-government propaganda had to contain concrete, vivid narratives—“the bloodier, the better.” The masses’ thirst for melodramatic, sensationalist literature could never be sated. “If one can get hold of a few good pictures taken from army life in Africa—all the better” (see Figure 10.2). This was the way to mobilize voters in small remote villages, who might lie beyond the reach of Social Democratic agitators but who might also be too lazy to troop to the polls. “People in such ‘hedgerow hamlets’ will cut out items like these and paste them to the wall,” wrote Asch—“and so the suggestion begins to take effect.”

Given that German “honor” was at stake, Asch warned that it would make the worst possible impression “if former soldiers of the colonial *Schutztruppe* . . . were publicly to oppose government policy.” If the nay-sayer in question was a known Social Democrat, or even a member of the Free Trade Unions, he should be offered an outright bribe, something like this: Now that he was home from the colonies, would “some monetary support perhaps help foster his advancement?” Again subterfuge was crucial: “Obviously, this [money] must not originate from any *election* organization but rather from a humanitarian committee.” If the soldier should “nibble at the bait, or even signal his willingness to do so,” his name should be “communicated to the most promising candidate in the government camp.”

This strategy had its natural complement. “The names of the soldiers fallen in Africa should be immediately put up in churches and perhaps on war veteran memorials of village parishes.” Even the unveiling of such plaques or memorials had to be orchestrated to the *n*th degree. The unveiling should occur with the assistance of high-ranking officers and administrators. “In the early morning, the district governor or the regional governor must call on the parents of the honoree, in a simple manner, without any entourage, and ask whether he was the only breadwinner.” If he was, of course, his sacrifice for Germany’s honor would be that much greater. But “the main thing during the actual ceremony is: not a word about politics! The fewer exhortations from above, the better the election will turn out.”

# Wählt zur Ehre des Vaterlandes gegen seine Zerstörer!



Bebel's Heer/djaren in der Arbeit.

Figure 10.2. “To Honor the Fatherland, Vote Against its Destroyers!” Illustrated flyer no. 55 of the Imperial League Against Social Democracy, for the Reichstag elections of January 1907. Caption: “Bebel’s legions at work.” Text at top left: “This is what will happen if a Social Democrat is elected.” We see a house in flames, unsuccessfully defended by a settler, whose wife is on her knees and whose child lies dead on the ground. Indigenous Africans aim rifles and spears at them. Top right: “This is what will happen if a loyal German man is elected.” We see a fertile field ploughed by a settler shaking hands with a colonial soldier. Large palms shade the house in the background.

Source: Michal Klant, ed., *Der rote Ballon. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie in der Karikatur* (Hanover, 1988), 87.

Were Asch’s recommendations about modern electioneering actually adopted by the government or the “state-supporting” parties? In Saxony, no such chicanery or stage-management was hinted at in the reports of district governors, but one would not expect them to be noted there. Asch’s list of constituencies that might be won back from the Social Democrats or the Center also failed to accord with the calculations made by Mehnert himself and by the nationalist associations. Of those constituencies listed by Asch—and subsequently cited in memoranda from Bülow and Loebell—no fewer than eleven were in Saxony.<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile, a flyer apparently printed by the Navy League listed thirty-four such constituencies.

<sup>137</sup> Saxony 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 21, 23; Bülow to Vitzthum, 22.12.06, BAP, Rkz 1794.



But only six of these were in Saxony.<sup>138</sup> Were these election managers working from the same playbook?<sup>139</sup>

When Friedrich Vitzthum<sup>140</sup> replied to "My dear Bernhard" on 5 January 1907, he reported that government leader Hohenthal had convened a meeting of his five regional governors and informed them of the chancellor's marching orders.<sup>141</sup> He had also shared Bülow's instructions with "our mutual friend" Mehnert, who reported that he had already taken some of the steps recommended by Asch. Mehnert and Hohenthal believed that only three or four seats could be taken away from the SPD in Saxony: "No one reckons on more, despite lively agitation." Why so few? Vitzthum repeated one of Mehnert's constant refrains about the campaign: the left liberals were to blame. "The disunity of the parties of order is being caused predominantly by the abrasive and unpolitical actions of the left liberals, who have gone over the head of their moderate leaders. Many run-off elections are expected, but still no one counts on more than 5–6 *Ordnungsparteiler* in total."

There were other flies in the nationalist ointment. Scholars have emphasized the degree to which radical nationalist associations set the tone of the campaign and took over the work of grass-roots agitation. This they certainly did in some constituencies. In 5: Dresden-Old City, for example, the local Pan-German chapter under Friedrich Hopf spearheaded the Dresden National Committee. Under one umbrella it brought together local chapters of the Pan-German League, the German Navy League, the Imperial League Against Social Democracy, the Protestant League, the German National Commercial Employees Union, the Electoral Association of Private Salaried Employees, the Dresden Lawyers' Association, and student fraternities.<sup>142</sup> But such cooperation and coordination was sporadic. In 14: Borna, no one was surprised that the Imperial League against Social Democracy flooded the constituency with flyers, pamphlets, traveling speakers, and party *Schlepper* in support of their chairman Eduard von Liebert. By contrast, the Protestant League exerted more effort in the Saxon east, where Catholic Sorbs would help determine the result, than they did in 10: Döbeln, where their director Otto Everling was a candidate. Gustav Stresemann's candidacy in 21: Annaberg was almost certainly directed by the organization he had founded, the Association of Saxon Industrialists. If so, this was not mentioned in the reports of local governors.

These three constituencies, with their prominent nationalist candidates, proved to be among the most contentious ridings in Saxony—contentious, that is, among the different "state-supporting" factions, not between these and the Social Democrats. In each case the leader of a powerful nationalist association was forced to fight for the right to declare himself the common candidate of the "parties of order." Analysis of Saxon constituency races reveals many other instances where the election campaign was coordinated mainly by established party leaders; where it

<sup>138</sup> Saxony 9, 11, 12, 14, 20, 21.

<sup>139</sup> "Erläuterung," n.d., BAP, Rkz 1794.

<sup>140</sup> As noted earlier, President of the I.K. Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt.

<sup>141</sup> Vitzthum to Bülow, 5.1.07, BAP, Rkz 1794.

<sup>142</sup> Also the *Verein der Bodenreformer* and various other *Bürger-* and *Bezirksvereine*.

was packaged for public consumption mainly by editors of party newspapers; and where it was fought mainly by party functionaries. Those leaders, writers, and activists often confounded the plans of Bülow *and* of radical nationalists.

## JUBILATION

When the polls closed in January 1907, the number of ballots cast for SPD candidates in Saxony had shrunk from 441,000 in 1903 to 418,000. This represented a decrease from 59 to 48 percent of the popular vote. When Saxony's eight run-off elections were completed on 5 February, the outcome was more dramatic still: the SPD lost every one. Of the twenty-two Saxon seats the SPD won in 1903, it was left with only eight (see Table 10.1).<sup>143</sup> Six were clustered in a solid block around Chemnitz and Zwickau—Saxony's most heavily industrialized region. The other two included Dresden's suburbs and its semi-rural environs to the north and south.<sup>144</sup>

Before the election, most insiders had expected the Center Party to return as many deputies to the Reichstag nationally as it had in 1903; in fact it increased its Reichstag representation by five seats, to 105. When they learned this, Bülow and Wilhelm turned on a dime. Both men claimed that the election had really been directed against the SPD alone. As one insider reported, "The fact that the Center will move into the new Reichstag not weakened, indeed even *numerically* strengthened, is now silently passed over by Kaiser Wilhelm, just like his Reich Chancellor."<sup>145</sup> Wilhelm believed "the Social Democrats [had] been dealt such a smarting blow on the head" that the future looked bright.<sup>146</sup> He changed his mind about universal manhood suffrage too: "The existing franchise had, in the Emperor's opinion, been proved to work satisfactorily and His Majesty was particularly pleased at the result of the elections in Saxony."<sup>147</sup> Saxon King Friedrich August III was effusive—embarrassingly so. His telegram to Dresden's mayor Otto Beutler ended with the line, "*It is a joy to be alive.*" The king's congratulatory telegram to Hohenthal was too gushy even to print.<sup>148</sup> No matter how it was expressed, "the surprise about the outcome of the elections in Saxony was monstrous: *no one* had expected anything of the sort."<sup>149</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Before the RT dissolution of 13.12.06, the SPD had lost a Saxon by-election.

<sup>144</sup> Saxony 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; and Saxony 4, 6. See the map showing Reichstag elections in Saxony, 1907. Only two party bastions remained in 1907, as shown in a second online map. For the entire Reich, see the map entitled *Deutsches Reich. Reichstagswahlen vom 25. Januar 1907*. All in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>145</sup> Austrian envoy to Prussia, Count Ladislaus Szögyényi, to Austrian FO, 5.2.07, cited in Lerman, *Chancellor*, 171 (original emphasis).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Br. Ambassador Sir Frank Lascelles (Berlin) to Grey, 6/7/21/28.2.07, BFO-CP, FO 371/257, reel 11, no. 545, here 28.2.07.

<sup>148</sup> Braun, 6/9.2.07, HHStAV, PAV/53 (original emphasis).

<sup>149</sup> Montgelas, 12.2.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965 (original emphasis).

Table 10.1. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1903 and 1907

	16 June 1903			25 January 1907		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives	85,321	11.4	0	92,206	10.6	3
National Liberals	97,869	13.0	0	225,034	26.1	6
Left Liberals	46,769	6.2	0	44,405	5.2	2
Antisemites	73,656	9.8	1	59,678	6.9	3
Agrarian League, WV, etc.				18,548	2.1	1
Social Democrats	441,764	58.5	22	418,570	48.5	8
Total votes cast/seats	754,894	/	23	866,571	/	23
Turnout (%)	83.0			89.7		
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	948,448	10.0	54	1,060,209	9.4	60
Free Conservatives	333,404	3.5	21	471,863	4.2	24
National Liberals	1,317,401	13.9	51	1,630,581	14.5	54
Left Liberals	872,653	9.2	36	1,497,041	12.3	49
Antisemites	244,543	2.6	11	94,869	0.8	16
Economic Union (WV) etc.	230,134	2.4	8	343,120	3.1	14
Social Democrats	3,010,771	31.7	81	3,259,000	28.9	43
Total votes cast/seats	9,533,826	/	397	11,303,537	/	397
Turnout (%)	76.1			84.7		

*Notes:* Main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. RT caucus totals include “guests” (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*). The Catholic Center Party, Poles, and other small groups have been omitted for clarity. For a more complete overview, see the tables showing RT election results, prepared by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

*Sources:* “Allgemeine Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1903,” *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutsche Reichs*, Ergänzungsheft zu 1903, Teil IV (1904): 1–7, 45–7; “Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1907,” *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutsche Reichs*, Ergänzungsheft zu 1907, Heft I (1907): 44–7, 66–9, Heft III, Zweiter Teil (1907): 8–9, 121–4; “Die Wahlen zum Deutschen Reichstag im Königreich Sachsen von 1871 bis 1907,” *ZSSL* 54, no. 2 (1908): 173; RWA, 41, 89; Scheil, *Entwicklung*, 296f., 319f.

Although the Social Democrats were “dejected and embittered,”<sup>150</sup> in some quarters astonishment about the election outcome was tempered by uncertainty about its ramifications. “Strange result, this,” wrote a contributor to one Saxon newspaper: “the government set out to hunt black boars and ended up bagging red deer.”<sup>151</sup> After only the first ballot had been completed, Eyre Crowe in Britain’s Foreign Office thought it “rather early days for the government to cry victory! . . . The socialists have lost seats, but it remains uncertain whether they have not actually polled more *votes* than before.” Once the run-offs were completed, Fairfax L. Cartwright reported from Munich that the “shouts of triumph” continued and that official circles in Berlin were “more than satisfied” with the results. Wilhelm

<sup>150</sup> KHM Rumpelt (Dresden), “Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906,” (11.3.07), SHStAD, Mdi 5390.

<sup>151</sup> Cited in Braun, 6.2.07, cited previously.

had addressed the jubilant crowds from his palace window: “‘Not only can we ride, but we are in a position to ride down the opposition from whatever quarter it may come.’” “So spoke the Kaiser,” reported Cartwright; “But has he studied the figures of the votes cast?” The victory over the Social Democrats looked more like “a drawn fight” than any “infliction of a crushing defeat upon them.”<sup>152</sup>

When Saxons and non-Saxons tried to explain why the “red kingdom” became a “national land” in 1907, their appraisals were similar.<sup>153</sup> In roughly the same order of importance they cited the following reasons for the surprising turnaround: The “simple, national election call” had favored the “parties of order.” Thousands (e.g. “43,000”) of Social Democratic fellow travelers from 1903 had abandoned the party: allegedly artisans and small businessmen, even some workers, had resisted SPD “terrorism” this time. Government leader Hohenthal enjoyed the trust of “wide circles” of people, who hoped for a “fresh breeze in government affairs”; he had been astute in reaffirming his pledge to implement suffrage reform on 15 January, that is, ten days before the main ballot.<sup>154</sup> The popular mood was better too, vis-à-vis the royal family and because the economy had improved.<sup>155</sup> Previous non-voters (e.g. “97,000”) had turned out to the polls: according to the Bavarian envoy, they had “all cast an anti-socialist ballot.”<sup>156</sup>

One sentiment often expressed in Protestant Saxony was that hatred of Catholics had successfully been channeled against Social Democracy. With the Pan-German Paul Liman taking the lead in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, the Saxon press had emphasized this theme more with each passing week. According to one regional governor, this strategy worked: “Many a vote was lost by Social Democracy *only* because it had to take its place in opposition on the side of the Center.”<sup>157</sup> The Bavarian envoy Montgelas agreed that Saxony’s *furor protestanticus* had been instrumental: by casting a ballot against the “reds,” he claimed, voters wanted to “demonstrate their hatred for the ‘blacks,’ because the latter could not be reached directly.”<sup>158</sup> Anti-Catholicism and anti-socialism in Saxony had provided the “parties of order” with flexibility in deciding when to stress one campaign theme over another (there was even talk of forming an “Imperial League against the Roman Confessional”).<sup>159</sup> The lesson of 1907 was reported to Vienna this way: “the Center, as is so often claimed, is not actually the most effective dam against the flood of Social Democracy.” In Saxony, the national parties had now claimed this role for themselves.

<sup>152</sup> Reports to the Br. FO from Sir Frank Lascelles (Berlin), 27.1.07, with Eyre Crowe’s minute of 29.1.07; from Lord Hugh Gough (Dresden), 6.2.07; from Fairfax Cartwright (Munich), 9.2.07; and from others; BFO-CP, FO 371/257, reel 11, no. 545, pp. 114–256, *passim*.

<sup>153</sup> For the following, cf. *inter alia* KHM Rumpelt (Dresden), “Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906,” cited previously; Montgelas, 12.2.07 (draft), cited previously; Braun, 28.1.07, 6/9.2.07 HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>154</sup> Thus, no one would be able to claim that Hohenthal, like his predecessor Metzsch, had delivered an *Angstprodukt* after the election.

<sup>155</sup> The Crown Princess Affair was forgotten, higher taxes and “suffrage robbery” less so.

<sup>156</sup> Montgelas, 12.2.07, cited previously.

<sup>157</sup> Rumpelt’s annual report on 1906, cited previously.

<sup>158</sup> Montgelas, 12.2.07 (draft), cited previously.

<sup>159</sup> “*Reichsverband gegen den römischen Beichtstuhl*”: Becker, “Kulturkampf,” 76.

In three last ways, observers linked Social Democracy's defeat in 1907 to the future prospects for social peace and political reform. In each case, the meaning of the "Hottentot election" lay in some doubt. First, many anti-socialists used terms like "right-thinking burghers," "wide circles of people," and "previously apathetic voters" as synecdoches for Saxon society. Yet as he composed his draft report to Munich, the Bavarian envoy sensed that he should not claim to understand the mood of "the people" or exaggerate the nationalist victory. "It is not easy," he wrote, "to get a clear idea of all the reasons for the great change ~~in Saxon public opinion which knocked Social Democracy / in Saxony / so completely / so surprisingly / to the ground.~~"<sup>160</sup> Many political observers were convinced that it was mainly lower-middle-class voters who produced such different outcomes in 1903 and 1907. One such observer wrote that these voters had once cast their ballot for the SPD (1903) but had never really, "in their heart of hearts," had anything in common with Social Democracy. He added: "Regarding that large number of people who previously voted socialist and now [voted] anti-socialist, I cannot demonstrate any special evidence about the strength of character and political reliability of the Saxons. So the oft-cited '*Sachsentreu*' appears in a very peculiar light."<sup>161</sup> Such skepticism represented minority opinion. More observers believed that members of the *Mittelstand* had undergone a genuine change of heart in 1907: they had abandoned the option of casting a protest vote for the SPD.

This raises the second point. Although district governors, regional governors, police directors, and others close to the action in January 1907 paid considerable attention to the nationalist pressure groups and the novel tactics they introduced into Reichstag campaigns, they were not uncritical of those groups, and they tended to put more positive emphasis on the role of established political parties. Bülow and Mehnert, for example, both resisted the efforts of Pan-Germans and other radical nationalists to transform the "National Committees" they formed in December 1906 into permanent features of right-wing politics. Such committees and the larger organizations they represented repeatedly tried to allay worries that they intended to take over the work of the main parties, during or between elections. But those worries persisted among leaders of Saxony's Kartell parties.

No one expressed them better than Dresden's regional governor Anselm Rumpelt—the same Rumpelt who had served as Metzsch's suffrage advisor in 1903. Rumpelt incorporated these countervailing opinions about the role of the nationalist pressure groups into a coherent picture. He praised the work of groups like the Imperial League against Social Democracy, but he predicted that the momentary excitement they had generated during the campaign would not last. Echoing views expressed by other well-placed members of Saxon political society, Rumpelt favored retaining the traditional political parties, insulating them from radical nationalism, and helping them modernize their campaign tactics.

Rumpelt observed that candidates of the "parties of order" had become more vocal and confident during the 1907 campaign. By contrast, "the Imperial League

<sup>160</sup> For this and the following, Montgelas, 12.2.07 (draft), cited previously.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

against Social Democracy, through the distribution of flyers, the sending of visiting speakers, etc., deployed an activity that was almost unearthly but not always completely irreproachable." In previous campaigns, "state-supporting" candidates had been forced to manage their election rallies on their own: "to the objections of their opponents they had to justify themselves almost like defendants." In 1907, however, "the national candidate often appeared with a whole staff of debaters—some more talented than others—who entered the fray on their behalf as crown witnesses and thereby had a much more effective influence on the meeting." Indeed, "the national candidates even went with their followers into Social Democratic meetings and fought there with the Social Democratic speakers." But Rumpelt felt this strategy was wrong-headed and would fail in the long run. Having heard that the local branch of the Pan-German League planned to keep alive its Dresden National Committee, which the Social Democrats belittled as Dresden's "mish-mash committee," Rumpelt saw dangers ahead. "The opposing interests and viewpoints that exist among the non-socialist parties cannot be overlooked without damage being done; precisely the most decisive and self-assured elements, which perform the best service in political battles, withdraw grumpily from party events in which all principles are blurred." Therefore Rumpelt felt that local Conservative, Reform, National Liberal, and Radical associations, "with their more compact aggregation of like-minded colleagues," should remain in place. *They* should constitute "the cadres for the mobilization of an election movement" that would update the politics of notables. Instead of delivering boring party speeches to poorly-attended rallies, and instead of "preaching doctrinaire party principles" to the already converted, the existing parties were already learning to focus on "the distribution of flyers and the more frequent holding of public meetings to discuss contemporary affairs."<sup>162</sup> In all this, the Saxon government had to lend a hand. Analogous to what the Agrarian League and other associations had created long ago, Rumpelt recommended that Saxony's ministry of the interior establish a *Pres-bureau*, by means of which "false or twisted statements in the press could be refuted blow by blow."

The third and last point registered a shift in the relative influence of Saxony's political parties. Not since 1887 had National Liberals done so well among the "parties of order." Their Reichstag victory would give National Liberals new strength and influence in the Saxon Landtag. It would also provide support for Hohenthal when he faced Conservatives determined to block suffrage reform. Foreign observers disagreed among themselves on this point. Austria's envoy was skeptical. But the Bavarian Montgelas was convinced that the SPD's defeat in January and February 1907 had "considerably strengthened" the prospects for suffrage reform in Saxony and undermined the "favorite arguments . . . of worried spirits." The Reichstag election "provided evidence that, even in Saxony, united action by the non-socialist parties sufficed to effectively prevent the flooding of the

<sup>162</sup> "Something to consider," wrote Friedrich August III in the margin of this report.

Landtag by Social Democrats.”<sup>163</sup> Among all these “lessons” of 1907, this one most directly influenced the negotiations leading to Saxon suffrage reform in 1909.

A gulf still existed between those who felt that Social Democracy’s advance in Saxony had been halted and those who called for even more vigilance. The latter argument was deployed by the SPD’s fiercest opponents and it went like this: The Reichstag elections of January 1907 did not marginalize the power of Social Democracy; no one could proclaim “mission accomplished” because the SPD would seek to avenge the verdict of 1907. Almost one in two voters had cast his ballot for the “party of revolution.” Therefore, as in the 1890s and after 1903, anti-socialists must not become complacent or slacken their attacks on the SPD. We have a perfect statement of this point of view in a report written by Maximilian Mehnert—younger brother to Paul.<sup>164</sup>

In 1907 Max Mehnert was governor of a small administrative district not far from Plauen. Exactly one week after the run-off elections of 5 February, he sent to Dresden a report very much in the style of his brother. The younger Mehnert was probably aware of the ill-will his brother felt toward Hohenthal’s suffrage expert Georg Heink. That did not prevent Max from marrying Heink’s daughter Josepha in 1908.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps no one could have predicted in early 1907 that such a match would bring these two families together. But the Saxon king would certainly have been familiar with the Mehnert family name. Beside the paragraphs in which his district governor ranted against Social Democracy and warned against underestimating its influence, Friedrich August III wrote, “Very correct assessment. Is Mehnert in line for a higher posting?”

Max Mehnert reported on the important support that nationalist candidates had received in his district from teachers, local school inspectors, and other servants of the state. His report moved quickly from past to future tense—from the election campaign just won to those still to be fought. In Mehnert’s view, the fate of coming elections would hinge on two things: “keeping voters on their toes” and “not surrendering to any illusion about the danger of Social Democracy as a party that threatens our political, economic, and cultural existence.” The first matter was properly the concern of civil servants. Echoing the same concern that ran through Bülow’s and Mehnert’s correspondence about the recent campaign, the younger brother wrote that civil servants had to do their duty on election day. But they must also demonstrate “an interest in political life” and actively participate in it, “if not directly and publically, then indirectly and behind the scenes.” Civil service posts, he wrote, should be filled “keeping in mind this important political aspect.” In towns and villages, this strategy was bound to succeed. But other well-respected persons had to be recruited. Mehnert identified the groups he had in mind: “intellectuals, teachers, scholars, artists, technicians, doctors, etc.” These people

<sup>163</sup> Montgelas, 15.2.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965. See also LWRK, 197–213.

<sup>164</sup> AHM Mehnert (Dippoldiswalde), “Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906” (excerpt), 12.2.07, with the king’s marginalia (transcribed), SHStAD, Mdl 5390. Dr. Wilhelm *Maximilian* Mehnert was AHM Dippoldiswalde 1903–09, AHM Plauen 1909–19, and later a MdLT. See also ch. 12.

<sup>165</sup> *SParl*, 425.

might be few in number, "but they exert a strong influence over wide circles of the population who do not regard Social Democracy as their representatives—at least not as directly as the working classes do." It was clearly the middle and upper-middle classes that Mehnert had in mind here. "Ceaseless agitation" and "promotion of the national cause from person to person" would pay dividends if undertaken by these groups.

Influential individuals were important for another reason. It was necessary to dispel any "conceptual confusion" about Social Democracy, which Mehnert ascribed to the "ignorance of the masses." The SPD must "continue to be characterized as a revolutionary party." Every effort must be made to win back Social Democracy's fellow travelers and to keep the *Mittelstand* from joining its ranks. It was necessary to reconcile the "embittered classes of people" who had been seduced by the SPD. In the final analysis, however, "there must be no question of seeking a reconciliation or reaching agreement with the party itself." Beside these last lines, the Saxon king wrote "Bravo!"

In short, the brothers Mehnert were able representatives of bourgeois anti-socialism in Saxony. In their opinion, to deal rationally with the SPD reflected "confusion" on the part of the government, just as supporting Social Democracy was the result of "confusion" among voters. To be sure, some influential voices among Saxony's political elite began to adopt a more optimistic, pragmatic view. In their opinion, the momentum generated by the SPD's near-sweep of Saxon constituencies in 1903 had been reversed. That was "the most important thing," wrote Rumpelt in March 1907. "At long last, the paralyzing belief found among *bürgerlich* circles—as though the advance of Social Democracy is unstoppable and as though, in Saxony, no success against it is worth striving for any longer—has been taken away."<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, these two points of view were compatible. In Saxony, hard-liners and pragmatists found common ground on which to fight socialists at election time and when devising a new suffrage for the Landtag.

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Before December 1905, Social Democrats had signaled their sympathy with suffrage reformers in Belgium, Austria, and Russia by claiming that German workers had learned to speak their language. In that month, protesters in Leipzig and Dresden taught German workers to "speak Saxon." The culture of working-class protest was already changing before 1905, and so were the revolutionary and reformist goals that Social Democratic leaders pursued. But when tens of thousands of workers penetrated to the symbolic centers of authority in Dresden, they plunged the Saxon state into crisis. Within months its government leader had resigned, replaced by a man—Saxony's former envoy in Berlin—who was predisposed to accept Prussian objections to meaningful reform. During his tenure as Saxon leader, which lasted only from 1906 to 1909, Count Hohenthal fought against this disposition: he tried to fulfill his mandate to legislate a suffrage reform

<sup>166</sup> KHM Rumpelt (Dresden), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1906," cited previously.



that would quiet popular unrest in Saxony. But even before Hohenthal's bill was ready to present to the Landtag, Paul Mehnert was lobbying in Berlin to undermine his authority and prevent meaningful reform. Both the bloodshed and the ink that was spilled in the winter of 1905–06 made it possible for this Conservative leader to await a more favorable occasion to begin the hard task of suffrage reform. During and after the Reichstag election of January 1907, Social Democrats were on the defensive on two fronts.

For the enemies of socialism, the stars aligned perfectly in 1907, as they had in 1887: an unscheduled election caught the SPD off-guard, battle was joined over military funding and national honor, and a "rush to the polls" benefited the Right. The victory of 1907 was different, though. First, it demonstrated the power of the extra-parliamentary Right to mobilize the core constituencies of the anti-socialist parties *and* previously unaffiliated or apathetic voters. Second, leaders of these nationalist pressure groups had no intention of fading into the woodwork. Declaring that Berlin had "at last" acknowledged their view of foreign policy as the correct one, they pushed more radical programs on the public and the government. As one scholar has put it, they claimed for themselves "custodianship of the symbols of national authority."<sup>167</sup> They soon outstripped the Kaiser and his government in the radicalism of their anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and antisemitic plans.

This nationalist opposition had taken shape in stages—after 1890, after 1900, after 1903. Until 1907 it had lacked firm support and remained frayed around the edges. By 1911 it had coalesced into something worthy of the name. It neither supplanted nor eclipsed the influence of those who remained loyal to the crown and willing to follow its lead. On the eve of the 1912 Reichstag elections, however, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg was rightly worried that his predecessor, Bülow, had opened a Pandora's box. The spirits released after 1900 infiltrated the "interlocking directorate of the Right," providing an ideological vanguard without supplanting the pragmatic old guard.<sup>168</sup> As was to happen again in the 1920s, the German Right's fringes had to cooperate with its core, and vice versa; there was no other way to channel Germany's social democratization into election victories and away from revolutionary upheaval. Their common goal remained the same: to slow, halt, or reverse Germany's political democratization.

<sup>167</sup> Chickering, *We Men*.

<sup>168</sup> This argument is developed further in Retallack, *German Right*, esp. Introduction and ch. 1.

# 11

## Dance

Ballots are also bullets; but in German, a *Stimme* can be a ballot, a vote—or a voice. A similar German word has no English equivalent: *stimmig*. It means something like coherent and harmonious, perhaps with a hint of “beauty” thrown in. *Stimmig* is precisely what Saxony’s suffrage reform was *not*.

Between 1903 and 1909, all voting systems put forward for consideration in Saxony were complex; many were incoherent; none was genuinely cohesive. Harmony among the majority parties and the government was conspicuously absent. And what emerged was not a beautiful thing. The plural suffrage finally legislated in 1909 awarded one, two, three, or four ballots to each eligible elector according to criteria based on property, income, education, and age. But many parts of the new law were leaky, craggy, cobbled together in haste. When the parliamentary “dance” ended in January 1909, did the mass of Saxon voters have a real voice in how they were governed?

Government leader Hohenthal staked his reputation on ending Saxony’s suffrage reform crisis. The law of 1909 was a radical departure from previous systems. The fusing of different suffrage features was described as a leap in the dark.<sup>1</sup> But it was not uplifting. The devil was in the details. Close scrutiny of the law’s provisions—and their intended effect—reveals how Saxon political culture was steered into anti-liberal, anti-socialist, and anti-democratic paths still recognizable from an earlier era. Retrenchment and reform were characterized as stark alternatives during these years. Retrenchment *through* reform carried the day.

All modern studies have told us that Saxony’s twisted road to suffrage reform in January 1909 is too complicated to merit detailed consideration.<sup>2</sup> They are wrong. As the second half of this chapter demonstrates, we need to examine the calculations that purported to reveal the “acceptable” number of ballots and seats that would fall to the SPD after suffrage reform because those calculations speak volumes. They do so only if we dig beneath the surface of parliamentary rhetoric.

In the suffrage reform debate we find clearly-drawn lines of inclusiveness and exclusivity. We also find rhetoric that explained how a pariah party should be treated in a modern constitutional state. That rhetoric was not consistent, so we have to listen carefully when arguments about the legitimacy of Social Democracy were put forward in closed-door committee meetings, in government memoranda, in parliamentary reports, on the floor of the Landtag, in the press. Such arguments

<sup>1</sup> See inter alia Austrian envoy to Saxony, Karl von Braun, to Austrian FO, 3.2.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>2</sup> Including the most pioneering and best analyses, e.g. Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” 85.

were shaped mainly by individuals and groups who deemed themselves to have special value to state and society. On this basis they also defined the criteria according to which electors should be awarded one, two, three, or four ballots.

Successful reform was not inevitable. A plural ballot system was not necessarily the most likely outcome. Only by considering statistical forecasts that never saw the light of day, only by citing alternative outcomes that were considered and abandoned, can we see that bourgeois Germans were profoundly uncertain about the best way to mirror their society in a representative political assembly. Only then can we understand how bourgeois codes conditioned the constitutional parameters within which political retrenchment was possible. As they did in 1868 and 1896 by implementing major suffrage reforms, Saxon legislators turned a page in 1909; they started a new chapter in their history. But it was part of a familiar tale—democracy deferred.

## A HOUSE DIVIDED

States only go to ruin through the guilt of the governments. As long as the highest authority remains pure and firm, the buzzing remains in the lower regions; once the upper tier starts moving, then the counter-balance disappears and the buildings either collapse in on themselves or else fall on their neighbors.

—Austrian Foreign Minister Clemens von Metternich,  
criticizing Britain's First Reform Act, 1832<sup>3</sup>

Let every eye negotiate for itself  
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch  
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.

—William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, act II, scene 1

Definitions of “crisis” are elastic. The crisis phase of Saxony's reform drama seemed interminable at the time. At least a dozen principal actors were involved. The “perilous question” of suffrage hung like a Sword of Damocles over every other issue.<sup>4</sup> How was the government's original proposal—“so complicated as to be almost incomprehensible”—transformed into workable legislation that caused few problems when it was first implemented?<sup>5</sup>

We begin by introducing the key players and providing a brief overview of the on-again, off-again negotiations between July 1907 and January 1909. Next we consider the “curse of hybridity”: the ill-fated attempt to weld together different electoral systems into an organic whole. This path was pursued tenaciously by Hohenthal's government and opposed by the National Liberals in like manner. Why did Hohenthal hold out so steadfastly when he refused to cut the Gordian

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 27.5.32, cited in Siemann, *Metternich's Britain*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> The allusion here is to Antonia Fraser's book on Britain's First Reform Act, *Perilous Question*.

<sup>5</sup> Citation from British envoy to Saxony, Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay (draft), 16.4.08, PRO, 215/55.

Knot of suffrage reform as others wanted him to do? Was he caught between advisors, who favored theoretically sophisticated suffrage systems, and the majority parties, which advocated simpler (though different) suffrages that worked to their advantage? Or was he too weary to stand on principle when the going got tough?<sup>6</sup>

#### SETTING PLACES

If Hohenthal was never far from the center of the action, neither was the Conservatives' Paul Mehnert. More than once the suffrage struggle was said to turn on the decisions of these two men, as though they commanded titanic armies with a single purpose. But they did not.

Around him Hohenthal mustered three groups of men. The state ministry he led had only one other important member: Finance Minister Rüger, well known as Mehnert's confidant and someone who believed that he, not Hohenthal, should enjoy the special favor of King Friedrich August III. The second group included the regional governors and district governors who reported to Hohenthal as minister of the interior. One such figure was Anselm Rumpelt, formerly Metzsch's suffrage expert, now Dresden's regional governor and reputed to be a leading candidate to succeed Hohenthal.<sup>7</sup> The third group was most directly engaged in the battle for electoral reform. First among equals was Privy Counselor Georg Heink. Mehnert had disparaged Heink's (and Hohenthal's) abilities in January 1907. Yet Heink drafted the government's suffrage bills in conscious opposition to National Liberal demands. When in the summer of 1908 he was tasked—as "private work"—with the chore of redrawing Landtag constituencies, he uncloaked himself as a Conservative partisan.<sup>8</sup> Heink worked closely with two men who also enjoyed Hohenthal's favor but held appointments outside the interior ministry. The first was Dr. Eugen Würzburger, the head of Saxony's Royal Statistical Office, who met often with Landtag deputies. Sometimes those deputies wanted to know within a few hours how many Social Democrats might be elected under their pet suffrage scheme.<sup>9</sup> The second was Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz, an up-and-comer whom we met in Chapter 9.

The National Liberals and Conservatives were consistently referred to as the "majority parties" in the Landtag—an acknowledgment that their mutual agreement would be necessary for successful legislation. This term papered over their antagonistic principles and aims. Both parties had more than their share of backbenchers, but in their front rows sat political stars who made it difficult to say what "the" National Liberal or "the" Conservative position actually was. Mehnert's right-hand man in the Conservative caucus was Gottfried Opitz, who chaired the ad hoc Suffrage Committee.<sup>10</sup> The same caucus included the large

<sup>6</sup> Prussian envoy to Saxony, Prince Hans zu Hohenlohe-Oehringen, 13.2.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, No. 2, Bd. 3; Braun, 3.2.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>7</sup> Bavarian envoy to Saxony, Eduard von Montgelas, 5.10.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965.

<sup>8</sup> In mid-1908 Heink's daughter Josepha married Maximilian Mehnert, younger brother to Paul. See ch. 10.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Würzburger to Mdl, 3.10.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5489; Würzburger to Mdl, 30.12.07, Mdl 5491.

<sup>10</sup> The *Ausserordentliche Wahlrechts-Deputation*.

estate owner Georg Andrä, who was influential in the Agrarian League, and the grain merchant Friedrich Kühlmorgen, whose real or alleged misdeeds included taking his housekeeper as his concubine—he had a mentally disabled wife—and the alleged buying of votes. These were independent spirits, loose cannons, in the Conservative camp; but they represented the divergent social and economic interests, mainly bourgeois, within Saxon Conservatism. Dresden's mayor Otto Beutler sat in the upper chamber, and he too sometimes diverged from the party line. Beutler was described as "a considerable personality of almost super-abundant energy, a constant and eloquent speaker on all public occasions"<sup>11</sup> Like Mehnert, he moved easily in Pan-German and other radical nationalist circles: he helped bridge the gap between men like Mehnert and Gustav Stresemann. If Beutler's ego outstripped theirs, it was a close contest. Like the Chemnitz antisemite Eduard Ulrich, who was also selected to the Suffrage Committee, he often spoke in support of the urban *Mittelstand*.

On the National Liberal side, Stresemann's challenge to the old guard was already waning by 1908. Talk of suffrage reform remained high on the agenda of Stresemann's Association of Saxon Industrialists. But as suffrage reform entered its acute stage, Stresemann had made the leap to national politics and serious advocates of reform of the upper chamber had faded almost to silence.<sup>12</sup> The left wing of the Saxon party was represented in parliament and on the Suffrage Committee by Max Langhammer and Franz Hettner, neither of whom was particularly eager to toe the line laid down by Paul Vogel, Saxon party chairman and member of the party's national executive. (Hettner succeeded Vogel as Saxon party leader in 1909, when Vogel succeeded Mehnert as president of the lower house.)

A political gap yawned between National Liberals and Landtag deputies standing to their left. The Radical Party, or *Freisinn*, was led by the crusty Oskar Günther. He was a businessman in Plauen who sat in both the Reichstag and the Landtag. His Landtag caucus numbered only three deputies in 1907–09, one of whom, Michael Bär, was also a prominent businessman and brickworks owner in Zwickau. Together Günther and Bär voiced classic left-liberal demands and they always tried to distance themselves from Social Democracy. Given the size of their caucus, the left liberals punched above their weight in the Suffrage Committee. They could hardly change the outcome of its deliberations, however.

The SPD was easier to gauge, partly because its advocacy of the general, equal, secret, and direct suffrage was categorically dismissed by all other parties as sterile doctrine. The Social Democrats were represented in the Landtag and on the Suffrage Committee by Hermann Goldstein, their lone deputy elected under the three-class suffrage. One cannot know what Goldstein might have achieved if he had not fallen gravely ill in 1908—too ill to participate in the final months of the Suffrage Committee's deliberations. Like Hohenthal, Goldstein did not live to see

<sup>11</sup> British envoy to Saxony, Lord Hugh Gough, 16.2.07, FO 371/259, BFO-CP, reel 13, no. 10711, pp. 228–33.

<sup>12</sup> Starke, "Dresden . . . Vorkriegszeit"; Pohl, *Stresemann*; Wagner, *Krieg*, 49–74.

the first election held under the suffrage against which he fought courageously and eloquently: he died on 14 June 1909, Hohenthal on 29 September.

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Early developments in Saxony's suffrage reform crisis—or saga—have already been surveyed. They began in July 1903 when the government of Georg von Metzsch announced a suffrage reform. It was designed to dampen the outrage expressed in the election of twenty-two Social Democratic Reichstag deputies the month before. Metzsch's plan was debated and defeated in the winter of 1903/04 before the Landtag reached its natural end in the spring. The Landtag election campaign of autumn 1905, like the one two years later, ratcheted up acrimony between National Liberals and Conservatives. It was soon overshadowed by bloodshed in the streets of Dresden and other Saxon cities in December 1905. Metzsch was forced to flee his residence by an angry crowd of demonstrators (recall that he was ordered by Chancellor Bülow not to abandon his post). When the Landtag session of 1905/06 ended without progress on suffrage reform, Metzsch was succeeded by Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen. He was given an eighteen-month honeymoon period to consider how he would solve the suffrage question. This was the only important task he had to complete before he left office.

The "final" act began in July 1907 when Hohenthal presented a hybrid voting system to the public. He wanted to allow the parties to consider it before the Landtag session began in November. The time seemed right for a new beginning: in November 1907 Saxon deputies moved from the cramped quarters that had served them since the 1830s into the beautiful new Landtag building designed by Paul Wallot. The first reading of Hohenthal's bill on 4–5 December 1907 immediately sent it to the "extraordinary committee"—something closer to a royal commission—struck to solve the suffrage reform crisis.<sup>13</sup> As agreed in the Suffrage Committee's first meeting in mid-December, its deliberations were strictly confidential. In March 1908, however, anger over its lack of progress compelled it to issue a first report on its deliberations; a second one followed in June.<sup>14</sup> In the first week of April 1908 the press announced that the majority parties had agreed on a *Kompromiß*. That compromise was based on the same principle that had commanded majority support in the spring of 1904: a unitary system of plural balloting. In May, however, Hohenthal declared that this compromise was unacceptable, not only to his government and the king but also to Saxon public opinion. He took the unprecedented step of adjourning the Landtag temporarily from May to October 1908. The Suffrage Committee, the parties, and the press continued to discuss myriad suffrage schemes.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *LTAkten* 1907/08, I.K., Dekrete, Bd. 3, Teil 1, Dekret Nr. 12; *LTMitt* 1907/08, II.K. 1:905ff. (4–5.12.07).

<sup>14</sup> *LTAkten* 1907/09, II.K., Berichte, Bd. 2, Bericht Nr. 331, "Vorbericht . . ." (16.4.08), covering 16.12.07–17.3.08; *ibid.*, Bd. 3, Bericht Nr. 487, "Anderweiter Vorbericht . . ." (4.6.08), covering 30.4.08–30.5.08.

<sup>15</sup> SHStAD, Mdi 5485–87. See also Mdi 5466, and ch. 9 of this book.

On 1 November 1908, the SPD organized a series of public demonstrations, in favor of universal manhood suffrage and against the delaying tactics of the Landtag. One is tempted to say that suffrage reform, and public pressure supporting it, had become the only issues on deputies' minds when the Landtag got down to business a few weeks later. However, at that time all of Germany, including Saxony, was abuzz with news of the Kaiser's ill-considered *Daily Telegraph* "interview."<sup>16</sup> In this atmosphere of national excitement, a plenary debate was held for three days on the government's suffrage bill.<sup>17</sup> When the National Liberals and Conservatives failed to reach agreement, the latter stripped out the bill's progressive features, invoked their narrow majority, and sent to the upper chamber a revised bill that was still unacceptable to the government (and almost everyone else). The outraged National Liberal members of the Suffrage Committee had already drawn up a minority report, claiming that the Conservatives had been unfaithful to the earlier *Kompromiß* and refusing to back down on the issue of redrawing constituency boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

During December and early January, a new composite committee (with members of both Landtag chambers) debated the last four options for reform that allegedly remained viable.<sup>19</sup> At this point, a Committee of Nine was formed to bring together party leaders from both houses and work out a final agreement. These discussions were not recorded; we cannot even be sure who the nine actually were. But on 20 January 1909 formal legislation reached the upper chamber. The spokesman for the Committee of Nine emphasized the turning point Saxony had reached. He alluded only indirectly to the bloodshed that had been spilled during bloody street protests organized by the SPD three days earlier: "The situation is grave, extraordinarily grave," Professor Adolf Wach reported. The December debates in the lower house had given rise to a "heavy tension, one can almost say as heavy as one that signals an approaching thunderstorm . . . We have reached the limits of our wisdom."<sup>20</sup> These portentous words led the Young Liberal deputy Georg Zoephel and the Bavarian envoy to describe the final bill as another "emergency law."<sup>21</sup> Hohenthal's address to the upper chamber admitted that the bill "made the best of a bad job."<sup>22</sup> These attempts at candor did not prevent the upper house from heeding Wach's warning and passing the bill. The lower house

<sup>16</sup> Hohenthal, 19.11.08, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; Findlay, 10/12/18.11.08 and 9.12.08 (drafts), PRO, 215/55. On the *Daily Telegraph* Affair, see the detailed account in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3:662–95.

<sup>17</sup> *LTMitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:4109–4344 (30.11–2.12.08).

<sup>18</sup> *LTAKten* 1908/09, II.K., Berichte, Bd. 3, Bericht Nr. 550, "Bericht der Minderheit . . . vom 4. Juni 1908 bis zum 6. November 1908" (23.11.08).

<sup>19</sup> *LTAKten* 1907/08, I.K., Berichte, Bd. 1, Bericht Nr. 493, "Bericht der verstärkten ersten Deputation der ersten Kammer . . ." (16.1.09); Oppe, "Reform," 319f., 399–405.

<sup>20</sup> *LTMitt* 1908/09, I.K., 1358.

<sup>21</sup> As the 1896 suffrage had been labeled. Montgelas, 25.1.09 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 967.

<sup>22</sup> Honorary attaché E. C. Trench to Br. FO, 28.1.09, PRO, FO 371/671, BFO-CP, reel 23, no. 2326.

ratified it on 22 January and royal assent was granted three days later.<sup>23</sup> After the necessary fine-print was added, the new Saxon suffrage formally became law on 5 May 1909.<sup>24</sup>

To divide this on-again, off-again process into discrete chronological slices, as a surgeon might do, would be unwise. Saxon politicians who were making this history from week to week often lost faith that the patient could *ever* be cured. Foreign envoys repeatedly concluded that the bond was severed between the Conservatives and the National Liberals: suffrage reform had reached a dead end.<sup>25</sup> We as historians must put the benefit of hindsight at arm's length—though no further.

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If we take seriously contemporary observations that most members of Saxony's Landtag were men of mediocre talent and disinclined to take the initiative, we can better understand the function of the Suffrage Committee as the fulcrum on which Saxony's political future was balanced. What did these men have in common? A great deal, as it happens. Did they even like each other? Not much. Were some more partisan than the typical parliamentarian of another time and place? No doubt. Can we discover their real motives for defining the political nation in one way and not another? That is the hardest question of all.

From the tone of exchanges behind closed doors, we can surmise that these men were not merely jockeying for advantage: the speakers' duels that erupted on the floor of the Landtag had their analogue in discussions, no less acerbic, behind closed doors.<sup>26</sup> During one particularly tumultuous Landtag session (11 March 1908), the Social Democrat Goldstein and the left liberal Bär were repeatedly interrupted "in the harshest manner" by Mehnert (in his role as president of the lower house). As Bär's "stentorian voice blared out his demand" again and again, "a roar of Bravos answered from the visitors' gallery," whereupon Mehnert ordered it cleared, without the customary warning. In the process the Bavarian envoy and a senior official from the Saxon foreign office were sent packing too.<sup>27</sup>

And yet: the social profile of the Suffrage Committee was remarkably homogenous. Compared to the Landtag as a whole, members of the Suffrage Committee were more wealthy, better educated, and better connected to social and economic networks. Among its twenty-three members, the Committee included only one "von"—Hans von Querfurth, Conservative owner of an iron and steel works in

<sup>23</sup> I.K. debate of 10.12.08 in SHStAD, MdI 5493. *LTMitt* 1908/09, I.K. 1358–65 (20.1.09), 1427 (25.1.09); *LTMitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:5117–5165 (22.1.09), vote of 77:5; *LTakten* 1907/08, Ständische Schriften, Nr. 107 (25.1.09): 207–38.

<sup>24</sup> *GVBl* 1909, "Wahlgesetz... vom 5. Mai 1909," 339ff.; Oppe, "Reform," Anlage G, 405–9. English translation appended to British envoy to Saxony, A.C. Grant Duff, 15.2.12 (draft), PRO, FO 215/60; Appendix 1, Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>25</sup> Reported e.g. by Montgelas; *LTMitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:4126 (30.11.08).

<sup>26</sup> The Suffrage Committee held forty-five meetings (12/07–01/09); the following is based on the handwritten "Protokolle über die Sitzungen der Wahlrechtsdeputation der I. und II. Ständekammer"; SHStAD, MdI 5493.

<sup>27</sup> *LTMitt* 1907/09, II.K., 3:2058–63; Findlay, 16.3.08 (draft), PRO, 215/55; Montgelas, 15.3.08 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 966.



Schönheiderhammer. The Committee included six Drs.—four Conservatives and two National Liberals.<sup>28</sup> They left little opportunity for opposition from the two left liberals, Günther and Bär, let alone from the Social Democrat Goldstein.

The Conservative chair of the committee, Gottfried Opitz, was Mehnert's sharp-tongued deputy both figuratively (in that he never minced words) and literally (he was vice-president of the lower chamber). Dr. Kühlmorgen, another Conservative, served as the committee's formal spokesman—*Berichterstatter*, akin to a jury foreman. The National Liberals' Franz Hettner played an ambiguous role as *Mitberichterstatter*: was he equal or subordinate to Kühlmorgen? Early on, it became obvious to the National Liberals that the Conservatives could invoke their overwhelming majority on the committee to pass any motion they liked (if they were united). Many National Liberal businessmen, however, also owned landed estates, and many Conservative landowners were also lawyers, merchants, industrialists, or mine owners. On balance National Liberals *did* defend the interests of industry and the large cities, while Conservatives *did* defend agriculture and the countryside. But we must not make the mistake of seeing causal connections where only rough correlations exist. A fine-grained mix of motivations led committee members to draw their own distinctions between political inclusion and exclusion.

One must also take into account the personal standing of committee members—like the large estate owner Georg Andrä—who were quirky and proactive in putting forward their own suffrage schemes. Long after it had become a hopeless cause, Andrä argued for the antiquated estate-bound suffrage, just as he did for other schemes that lay far outside the bounds of the fragile Conservative-National Liberal *Kompromiß*. Andrä managed to exasperate Mehnert, to whom he answered in the Conservative caucus and on the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association's board of directors. He suffered no recriminations for doing so. Andrä's estate of Braunsdorf near Tharandt comprised 216 hectares—over 500 acres. It provided an annual income of 1.2 million Marks. Andrä and others like him on the committee could afford to run with the foxes and hunt with the hounds.

The size of the Conservative majority on the Suffrage Committee—thirteen of twenty-three members—did not simplify matters. Hohenthal and Friedrich August III let it be known that merely outvoting the National Liberals—behind closed doors or in the Landtag—would not in itself produce a palatable suffrage reform. And National Liberals knew they would find at least some friends of industry and the cities on the other side of the table. Neither line of argument sufficed when it came time, in December 1908, to settle the most thorny issue of all: the redistribution of urban and rural constituencies.<sup>29</sup> At that moment the Suffrage

<sup>28</sup> The committee's twenty-three members included thirteen Cons. (including the AS Eduard Ulrich), eight NLs, two LLs, and one SD.

<sup>29</sup> The key files (SHStAD, Mdl 5489–90) hold not a single map of the new LT constituencies (WKe), only preliminary sketches, which Gisela Petrach of the SHStAD and Simone Lässig of the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, graciously located and had copied for me. For Saxony's LT WKe superimposed on RT WKe, see *Grasers Karte von Sachsen mit Angabe der Landtags- u. Reichstagswahlkreise* (Annaberg, n.d. [1912]), in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. See also Retallack, "Mapping the Red Threat."

Committee ceased to function as an effective parliamentary institution, as did the lower house of the Landtag. On 2 December one left-wing National Liberal observed that “the opposing trenches between liberals and conservatives, between industry and agriculture, are being deepened in such a way that one must fear for the future of the Saxon Fatherland (Great agitation on the Right) . . . That cannot bring peace.” It could only sow hostility among the *bürgerlich* classes, he added, and threaten their interests in future Reichstag elections.<sup>30</sup> The Lords had to be invited to the dance.

#### THE CURSE OF HYBRIDITY

When National Liberals declared that they would support nothing less than a unitary suffrage system, it was not clear what elements of a hybrid suffrage they disavowed. We can hazard two guesses why they stuck to this mantra.

National Liberals knew they were directly opposing the plans of government leader Hohenthal. They had done the same thing when Hohenthal's predecessor, Metzsch, had presented his suffrage reform *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903. On both occasions, they could reasonably expect to receive some public acclaim for their position. A combination of voting schemes, like those proposed by Metzsch and Hohenthal, allegedly ran contrary to the mood of the times. The plural suffrage was the suffrage of the future. As such, it deserved to be left alone—unadulterated by admixtures, caveats, codicils, or anything calculated to accomplish X or prevent Y. This pursuit of a unitary suffrage was disingenuous. National Liberals claimed to be trying to find the suffrage that would be fair and that would have longevity. We can hardly blame them for that. Yet, it remains a riddle why so many Saxons let them get away with the claim that the best suffrage would also be the simplest.

National Liberals, second, had hewed to the ideal of a classless society since the Enlightenment. Such a society was part of a bourgeois model where education and achievement, *Bildung* and *Leistung*, counted for a great deal, particularly when it was a matter of representing the “worthy” elements of society in a parliament like the Landtag. This was conceived as a modern, national society, freed of medieval and early-modern encumbrances like social estates and religious flummery.<sup>31</sup> National Liberals also saw a system of plural votes as an antidote to other schemes that inserted local communities—and “the local” as an idea—into the process of constituting a broader political nation. The plural suffrage also provided a means to resist Conservative and antisemitic demands for disproportionate representation of the *Mittelstand*; it offered a direct rebuttal to advocates of a suffrage based on occupations and social estates; and it could be used as a lever to eliminate distinctions between urban and rural voters. Subsuming these argument while

<sup>30</sup> *LT Mitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:4278–80 (Robert Merkel).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Brown, “Participation.”

serving as a rhetorical screen, the unitary plural suffrage would allow “just enough” Social Democrats to enter the Landtag. A hybrid system might let in too many.

Hohenthal and his advisor Heink decided to fly in the face of National Liberal wishes in 1907. Their suffrage scheme retained the essential features of the hybrid proposal that had gone down to defeat three years earlier. The government shared the National Liberals’ wish to diminish the power of the Conservatives in the Landtag; yet it believed the best way to do so was through a combination of proportional, communal, and plural voting schemes. It based this calculation on the new political situation following the Reichstag elections of January 1907. Non-socialist Landtag deputies recognized that Chancellor Bülow’s Bloc experiment in the Reichstag, which he described as the “marriage of liberal and conservative spirits,” had created strange bed-fellows. Observers predicted that the Bloc would produce only weak offspring or the occasional liaison before both partners sought divorce. But this marriage convinced Hohenthal that he could best cobble together a majority from the Conservative and National caucuses in the Landtag by proposing a hybrid suffrage. The Social Democrats’ *Leipziger Volks-Zeitung* had ridiculed Bloc candidates during the 1907 Reichstag campaign as “long-sighed-for, Semitic-antisemitic, agrarian-industrial, conservative-radical, bigoted-liberal, mish-mash candidates.”<sup>32</sup> The “parties of order” triumphed in 1907 despite such vitriol. But their Reichstag success of January 1907 took from their hands the most effective argument against suffrage reform in Saxony. Social revolution was not imminent after all. This situation allowed Hohenthal and his suffrage experts to prepare their hybrid reform plan in an atmosphere of relative calm and to introduce their proposal under favorable conditions. This would undercut the curse of hybridity.

News from Berlin also bolstered Hohenthal in his view that Prussian authorities would not object to Saxon plans. By the middle of 1907, Hohenthal knew that Prussian officials were preparing their own proposals to reform Prussia’s Landtag suffrage. Bülow had told the Conservatives that three-class voting was untenable in the long run. Chancellery Chief Loebell also counseled his Conservative friends in Prussia to accept—or rather allow Saxons to accept—whatever reform seemed most appropriate to the circumstances. Disagreeing with his friend Mehnert, in May 1907 Loebell thought the right thing to do was to “take in hand the [suffrage] revision at a point in time when the Conservatives have the majority in [Saxony’s] parliament, thereby precluding a suffrage revision that is too radical.”<sup>33</sup> Thus Hohenthal knew that Berlin would neither raise serious objections to suffrage reform in Saxony nor support diehard Conservatives who did.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> LVZ, 19.12.06, cited in Crothers, *Elections*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Saxon envoy to Prussia, Count Christoph Vitzthum von Eckstädt (Berlin), to government leader and MdAA Hohenthal (Dresden), 13.5.07, SHStAD, MdAA 4535.

<sup>34</sup> Hohenthal (Dresden) to Vitzthum (Berlin), 13.5.07, Stern, *Auswirkungen der Revolution*, 2/II:263–5; RSSdAA Heinrich von Tschirschky und Bögendorff to Bülow (copy), 29.10.08, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 8. On Bethmann Hollweg, see Vitzthum (Berlin) to Hohenthal (Dresden), 11.1.08, SHStAD, MdAA 1504, and ch. 10 of this book.

Saxons were playing a delicate game. Junkers in Prussia such as Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau could not imagine the possibility of Prussian suffrage reform, let alone accept it. Britain's envoy in Munich, Sir Fairfax Cartwright, understood these fears and recognized Saxony's pivotal role in determining the success or failure of democracy's advance in Germany. Reform of the three-class suffrage might appear to be "a purely Prussian question." But appearances were deceiving:

Liberal ideas find a more easy foothold south of the Main, as is shown by the fact that all the South German states . . . have altered their electoral laws in a liberal sense. Prussia, almost alone, clings to her electoral system and dreads the advance of liberal ideas from the south . . . Now the reform fever has crossed [the Main River] and has seized upon Saxony, which enjoys a similar electoral system to that in force in Prussia. This brings the question of reform to the doors of Berlin.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the national ramifications of suffrage reform in 1907, it was on the floor of the Saxon Landtag and in its committees that the "advance of liberal ideas" from the south was debated. The British envoy in Dresden echoed his colleague in Munich: "Saxony is geographically the spot where the conflicting currents of political opinion meet—the reactionary ultra-Conservative current from the north, and the Liberal current from the south." He spiced British understatement with disdain: "The meeting of these two currents occasionally causes a certain commotion in the usually placid pool of Saxon politics."<sup>36</sup> The "certain commotion" that began in 1907 was not just a parochial *Familiendrama*: it deserved the national attention it got.

In the Prussian Herrenhaus in January 1908, Chancellor Bülow, who was also Prussian minister president, declared that his government was still deliberating whether Prussia's three-class suffrage would be revised. Bülow's statement came very close to laying down the principles upon which the Saxon reform of 1909 would eventually pass. Any acceptable reform in Prussia, he declared, would "have to maintain and secure the influence of the great masses of the middle class upon the result of the elections, and will consequently have to aim at establishing an equitable gradation in the weight of the different classes of votes." This statement already drew cheers on the Right. Bülow continued: "The question to be considered will, therefore, be whether this object can be attained simply [by considering] the amount of taxes paid by the voter, or whether it would be expedient to grade the franchise upon other bases according to the age, property, and education attainments of the voter." So far all members of the Bülow Bloc could be happy. But then the chancellor applied the brakes: "As soon as the government has discovered a firm foundation upon which to frame its decisions," Bülow told the house, "it will approach the diet with proposals in a corresponding sense, but there is now no

<sup>35</sup> British envoy to Bavaria, Sir Fairfax Cartwright (Munich), 5.8.07, BFO-CP, FO 371/261, reel 15, no. 26391. Cf. Vogel, "Career."

<sup>36</sup> Findlay, 1.10.07, BFO-CP, FO 371/262, reel 16, no. 33969. Böckstiegel, *Volksrepresentation*.

prospect of the introduction of a measure with this object during the current session. (Loud cheers on the Right, hisses on the Left).<sup>37</sup>

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Saxons could not afford to wait. The government's draft bill of 1907 reverted to the same kind of hybrid system that had doomed Metzsch's proposal in 1904. It proposed a new Landtag composed of eighty-two members.<sup>38</sup> Forty-two deputies would be elected by secret and direct voting, incorporating proportional representation, and with a moderate system of plural ballots whereby no voter would be accorded more than two ballots. The remaining forty deputies would be elected through the organs of local government—rural district councils, municipal assemblies, and municipal councils.<sup>39</sup> In proposing this system, which included a very modest increase in the number of urban constituencies, the government cited the arguments of Albert Schäffle, among others. A noted sociologist and political observer, in 1890 Schäffle had argued that the representation of local interests provided a counterweight to direct and equal voting.<sup>40</sup> The government also claimed that its previous criticism of indirect voting was now irrelevant. Delegates elected in the first round of balloting under the three-class suffrage had been labeled mere ballot-carriers (*Stimmzettelträger*)—that is, unnecessary emissaries, because everyone knew which party they supported. Now members of local government bodies would play a different role. The preamble to Hohenthal's proposal claimed that because local assemblymen and counselors had other public functions to fulfill, they were ipso facto too high-minded to indulge in partisan politics.<sup>41</sup>

Hohenthal was trying to convince National Liberals that their strength in Saxon city halls might translate into power in the Landtag. The National Liberals had done well in municipal elections since plutocratic suffrages had been introduced in dozens of Saxon cities since 1890. The government nevertheless chose to ignore the fact that 805 socialists already sat in Saxon municipal bodies around the turn of the century. By 1909 that number had grown to about 1,600, and the SPD's interest in local politics showed no signs of waning.<sup>42</sup> National Liberals had mixed feelings about involving the institutions of local government in Landtag voting. On balance they opposed the idea.<sup>43</sup>

As a gesture to the Conservatives, the government offered the specious argument that the distribution of seats in a reformed Landtag should be determined not only by population but also by territoriality.<sup>44</sup> This rhetorical gift was gladly accepted by

<sup>37</sup> NAZ, 11.1.08. Most of this translation is taken from Lascelles (Berlin) to British FO, 13.1.08, BFO-CP, FO 371/457, reel 18, no. 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Heink's memo of 1.11.06, SHStAD, Mdl 5455; *LT Akten* 1907/09, Dekrete, Dekret Nr. 12; Oppe, "Reform," 374–409.

<sup>39</sup> *Bezirksverbände; Stadtverordnetenversammlungen; Stadträte.*

<sup>40</sup> Schäffle, "Bekämpfung," esp. 263, cited in Heink memo, 1.11.06. Cf. Schäffle, *Aussichtslosigkeit.*

<sup>41</sup> "Entwurf zum Wahlgesetz" (1907), 6f.

<sup>42</sup> Fricke, *Handbuch*, 2:777 (1899); acting Prussian envoy Heyl to Pr. FO, 22.8.09, PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>43</sup> See Bericht 487, 4–6 (30.4.08–11.5.08).

<sup>44</sup> "Rechte des Menschen" and "Rechte der Fläche," respectively. Cf. Hagen, *Wahlreform* [1908].

Andrä and other Conservative hardliners, invoking the scorn of left liberals in the house. The Progressive Günther wondered whether the Conservatives were “perhaps imagining that they were looking at the North African desert or the colony of South-West Africa. (Great amusement). There, one could speak of a right of territoriality.” However, added Günther, “in an industrialized, densely populated state, we cannot draw constituencies . . . according to the number of oxen that may be roaming around on them. (Great amusement.)”<sup>45</sup> The government sounded another Conservative note when it rejected the normal system of proportional representation (PR) based on party lists. It claimed that voters would be corrupted by having to vote for a party rather than a particular candidate. Instead it proposed a much more complicated proportional system whereby candidates would run in individual constituencies: each party would elect only the number of deputies—those with the highest vote totals—that were allocated to it after voting was completed.

The novelty of proportional representation was defended with the argument that a large number of non-socialist voters, under the simple majority formula, had been deprived of due representation in the Reichstag in 1903 when the SPD had won twenty-two Saxon seats. Immediately after that election, Saxon Conservatives had put forward this argument, which to them was not remotely ironic. Hohenthal’s proposal, more surprisingly, endorsed their point: “Under the domination of the majority system, it can happen that a political or economic party does not send a single representative to the chamber, although it enjoys the allegiance of a large part of the population.”<sup>46</sup> According to Heink, proportional representation was key to mobilizing “state supporting” voters who had been left without representation in the Reichstag in 1903 and whose political disaffection was fueling calls for Landtag suffrage reform in 1907. This rationale left the National Liberals unconvinced. Only under a system of universal suffrage, they believed, could proportional representation have an “equalizing” effect, whereas under the Landtag suffrage they advocated, it would “tear down the defensive bulwarks that would be put in place through plural voting.”<sup>47</sup>

At a later date, Hohenthal found himself defending an electoral system whereby eighty-four Landtag deputies would be elected through a plural suffrage and twelve would be chosen through proportional representation. His memorandum to the king describing this compromise demonstrated Hohenthal’s frustration with the National Liberals and their demand for a unitary suffrage. He railed against the “much-ballyhooed” unity of the electoral system favored by National Liberals, which, he claimed, divided electors into only two “classes.” After the huge protest demonstrations in Leipzig, Hohenthal again complained about the National Liberals’ “deeply regrettable” demand for a unitary system: “Despite all negotiations,” he wrote, they had become fixated on an “artificially-constructed plural system.”<sup>48</sup> If the Conservatives or the Landtag’s upper chamber were unable to

<sup>45</sup> *LTMitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:4129 (30.11.08).

<sup>46</sup> “Entwurf zum Wahlgesetz” (1907), “Allgemeine Begründung.”

<sup>47</sup> Bericht 487, 9. <sup>48</sup> Mdl to MdAA, 2.11.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5455.

make the National Liberal caucus see the light, Hohenthal would be in a good position to dissolve parliament and order new elections directed squarely against the National Liberals. As he put it, the Saxon government would enter the contest like a well-prepared military campaign, not only with a "clear conscience" but also "fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Conservative Party, the Agrarian League, and the *Mittelstand* Union."<sup>49</sup>

In short, Hohenthal and his advisors favored a hybrid system and rejected any notion that it was "cursed." By proposing a complicated system that met the wishes of many political camps, they were not merely making a virtue of necessity. Quite the opposite: they believed that the consequences of adopting a unitary system were too unpredictable to meet the essential requirement of state security.

#### HOENTHAL HOLDS OUT

Hohenthal chose to unveil his suffrage proposal in July 1907 in the southeastern city of Bautzen, not in the capital Dresden. He did so at the annual congress of Saxon municipal officials.<sup>50</sup> Like Metzsch before him, Hohenthal wanted to give Mehnert no opportunity to ring down the curtain on reform before he took center stage himself. Barely a month earlier the Austrian envoy had reported that "the government's proposal . . . still sits like an enigma in the state ministry's file cabinets."<sup>51</sup> The Conservatives had peeked at the script, however. Their outrage increased once the plan was formally announced. The group around Mehnert promised "to open the war in all its fury," having already declared that they would never surrender the distinction between urban and rural constituencies.<sup>52</sup> The Social Democrats were quick to cite these statements as evidence of "the prevailing ill humor in Saxon government circles against the extreme-conservative-agrarian clique."<sup>53</sup>

Conservatives in Saxony were prepared to fight tooth and nail against any reform of the Landtag suffrage. They did so "partly in earnest fear" and yet "only behind the *mask* of fear." In May 1907 Hohenthal became apoplectic—and not because he was suffering from a "nicotine heart"—when he learned that more than half of all Landtag deputies had pledged in writing (and on their honor) to oppose whatever suffrage plan he proposed—"without even knowing anything about what the proposal contains!"<sup>54</sup> One foreign envoy claimed to know who had ordered this preemptive strike: "It looks as though Mehnert, as he did previously with Metzsch's proposal, wants to let things come to a trial of strength."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Hohenthal to Friedrich August III, 16.9.08, HHStAD, Mdl 5455.

<sup>50</sup> *Gemeindetag*. "Entwurf zum Wahlgesetz für die Zweite Kammer der Ständerversammlung," enclosed with acting Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Erwein Gudenus, to Austrian FO, 18.7.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>51</sup> Braun, 29.5.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>52</sup> Montgelas, 13.7.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965; see also Montgelas, 14.7.07, *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> LVZ, 5.7.07; DJ, 6.7.07; NZ 25 (1907): 561.

<sup>54</sup> Montgelas, 15.5.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965 (emphasis added). Cf. Braun, 29.5.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>55</sup> Montgelas, 15.2.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965.

Hohenthal refused to abandon his hybrid electoral system until the very last moment, in December 1908. Even while his draft legislation was being plucked apart on the floor of the Landtag, he continued to insist that plural voting would retain the worst plutocratic features of the three-class suffrage. Hohenthal also rejected a proposal from the Suffrage Committee that demanded at least two years' residency in Saxony for enfranchisement. This stipulation was aimed not at vagabonds, as the Conservatives claimed, but at the more mobile ranks of young workers. Hohenthal's government also refused to compromise on the issue of a wholesale election of the Landtag every six years, even though Conservatives were adamant that Landtag elections would thereby become as "passionate" and "demagogic" as Reichstag elections. No less surprisingly, it argued against two key criteria for awarding extra ballots to certain voters: age and economic "independence." The latter criterion was advocated by National Liberals and Conservatives as a means to give greater influence to clergy, teachers, academics, doctors, and lawyers—though only those with a yearly income of at least 1,800 Marks. The government declared that age and economic independence provided no guarantee whatsoever that a voter would cast either his first or his second ballot "reliably."<sup>56</sup> In these ways, Hohenthal's suffrage plan was more progressive than either National Liberals or Conservatives could abide.

Was the Saxon government particularly high-minded? Were all its proposals workable? No. Consider one of the government's more controversial proposals. At a time when its original scheme already lay in tatters, the government outlined a system of plural voting whereby each elector would have either one or four ballots—but no one would have two or three. Hohenthal claimed that this system would be technically much simpler to implement than other options; it would also be more fair to members of the *Mittelstand*.<sup>57</sup> To this patently *unfair* proposal, the government wanted to graft a system of proportional representation that would apply ("regretfully") only to Saxony's five largest cities.<sup>58</sup> This provision was intended to rally National Liberals behind the government's plan: a high proportion of National Liberal votes were cast in cities where socialist victories resulted from the simple majority system. But neither Conservatives nor National Liberals fell into line.

Hohenthal's one-and-four ballot system is intriguing for another reason. It throws light on the government's underlying distinction between "loyal" voters and everyone else. Only the former should be privileged by a plural suffrage. Such privilege should be out in the open, where the mass of Saxon burghers could appreciate its logic—calling a spade a spade—even without invoking the spectre of Social Democracy explicitly. If all electors had either one or four ballots, they would supposedly be immune to one of the seven deadly sins: envy. Such a scheme would

<sup>56</sup> See esp. Hohenthal and Heink's arguments in the Suffrage Committee on 15.10.08; SHStAD, MdI 5493.

<sup>57</sup> Hohenthal's printed "Erklärung" to the Suffrage Committee (14.10.08), SHStAD, MdI 5455; Bericht 549, 88–9; Bericht 550, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Hohenthal, "Erklärung"; cf. LWRK, 218; Bericht 549, 101; Diersch, "Entwicklung," 288–9; Ritter, "Wahlen" (1990), 87.



reduce the chance that an elector would feel aggrieved by small economic and social inequalities—and thus also by the criteria for awarding a second or third ballot.<sup>59</sup> If such an elector compared his social rank and electoral influence on a graduated scale of one to four, he would be sure to complain about his own situation in life and the allocation of votes on a fine scale. By contrast—still according to the government's logic—he would be more willing to accept both the existing social and political order and the new suffrage if the line demarcating insiders and outsiders was explicit, even if someone close to him (a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker) was eligible to cast four ballots and he only one.

Where did the government want to draw this thick line through the electorate? To be eligible for four ballots (Group A) instead of only one (Group B), an elector would have to meet at least one of the following criteria: a) own property valued at 100 tax units or more, own at least four hectares (almost ten acres) of agricultural or forestry land, or own at least one hectare (2.4 acres) of market gardens or vineyards; b) maintain an annual taxable income of more than 2,200 Marks in the two years prior to any election; c) hold an annual salary of more than 1,900 Marks in the service of the Reich, the state, or local government, or as a private salaried employee; d) be eligible to vote for the local chamber of industry; or e) hold the school-leaving certificate that permitted one-year voluntary service in the military (such a volunteer was an *Einjährig-Freiwilliger*).<sup>60</sup>

Neither the government's logic about the sin of envy, nor its effort to spread electoral privilege widely, deserves as much attention as its determination to disadvantage the working classes.<sup>61</sup> In the Suffrage Committee session of 20 October 1908, the National Liberal spokesman (and caucus chairman) Paul Vogel argued that a layering of privilege according to his party's four-ballot scheme<sup>62</sup> would be more "conciliatory" toward workers than the government's plan. His left-leaning party colleague Max Langhammer called the government's one-or-four-ballot proposal "a class suffrage of the worst sort."<sup>63</sup>

Langhammer was right. Consider the way Heink researched the issue of constituency reapportionment during the summer of 1908 and how he presented his findings to the Suffrage Committee that September.<sup>64</sup> Foreseeing a total of ninety-six Landtag constituencies, Heink listed the name of every village, town, and city in each one. For each locality where statistics were available, Heink's table provided two columns of figures. The first one listed the approximate number of electors who had been eligible to vote in the Reichstag elections of 1907. The second listed the "approximate [number of] workers in larger industrial enterprises."

<sup>59</sup> Bericht 550, 11–15; Bericht 549, 90–8, 172f.; also Diersch, "Entwicklung," 289–95.

<sup>60</sup> Bericht 549, 101, §10.

<sup>61</sup> Heink's one-or-four ballot system would allegedly produce a total of 920,000 weighted ballots cast, of which 230,000 would be cast by four-ballot electors while 430,000 would be cast by one-ballot electors.

<sup>62</sup> That is, dividing electors into four groups, not two, and providing them one, two, three, or four ballots.

<sup>63</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5493 (20.10.08).

<sup>64</sup> Bericht 549, 3–57. For the NL constituency reapportionment plan, *ibid.*, 136–41. Cf. SHStAD, Mdl 5489.

This exercise illustrated that the government's proposal was premised on just two statistically important categories: working-class and non-working-class voters. Despite the fine distinctions that permitted an elector to claim one ballot or four, the Saxon government clearly imagined that most working-class voters would have only one-quarter the electoral weight of more privileged voters. For this radical distinction between insiders and outsiders, which was sure to draw public scorn, the government's plan received no support from either National Liberals or Conservatives.<sup>65</sup> The plural voting system eventually passed by those parties nevertheless ensured that social distinction and accomplishment *were* privileged at the ballot box, albeit in more subtle and politically palatable ways.

#### BACKSTAIRS GOVERNMENT

A different demonstration of Hohenthal's resolve to steer an independent course was provided by Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz when he addressed a meeting of the Dresden Conservative Association on 11 July 1907.<sup>66</sup> A year earlier, Hohenthal had rescued Nostitz from the lower ranks of Saxony's judicial administration and installed him as his informal advisor in the Saxon foreign office. At this time Nostitz was only thirty-six years old, but he was clearly on the way up. When he addressed Dresden Conservatives, his words were correctly taken to represent the government's position.<sup>67</sup> There are other reasons to pluck this young man from historical obscurity.

Nostitz epitomized the cultured man of letters, the rare Conservative who embraced modern times. His name crops up frequently in the memoirs of Harry Kessler, the "red count," who included Nostitz and his wife Helene (née Hindenburg) among his close friends. (Kessler and Nostitz had belonged to the same elite fraternity in Leipzig.) Alfred and Helene moved easily in artistic circles that also included Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Klinger. Even the Nostitz Armchair, which Alfred commissioned from Henry van de Velde in 1904, testifies to his forward-looking perspective: its sleek lines presage Bauhaus.<sup>68</sup> "Baron Nostitz has travelled much and read much," reported the British envoy. In words that applied equally to Alfred's uncle Hermann—Saxony's minister of the interior from 1866 to 1890—he added that the younger man "might be described as a liberal conservative; he is intelligent and a good speaker, and has been of the greatest assistance to his chief. He strikes me as a man who has a career before him."<sup>69</sup> Another envoy agreed that Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz was "a man of the future": the only question was when his time would come.<sup>70</sup> He was also no one's lackey. In Paul Mehnert's eyes, that meant Nostitz already had two strikes against him.

<sup>65</sup> Bericht 549, 74–8; SHStAD, Mdl 5493.

<sup>66</sup> Reported by all envoys, including acting Austrian envoy Gudenus, 31.7.07, HHStAV, PAV/53; cf. Pache, *Geschichte*, 100–32.

<sup>67</sup> Recall from Chapter 9 that Nostitz had sent a comprehensive suffrage proposal to Metzsch on 31.1.06; SHStAD, Mdl 5466.

<sup>68</sup> Images of the Nostitz Armchair can easily be found with an internet search.

<sup>69</sup> Findlay, 1.10.07, BFO-CP, reel 16/33969.

<sup>70</sup> Braun, 30.10.07, HHStAV, PAV/53 (and for the following phrase).

To rally support for Hohenthal's suffrage proposal, which he probably helped draft, Nostitz told Dresden Conservatives on 11 July 1907 that they had to concede some of their disproportionate power before it was too late. "The slogan 'Struggle against revolution,'" declared Nostitz, "no longer suffices to excite anyone anymore."<sup>71</sup> Instead, law-abiding citizens were being driven to the SPD by the unfair suffrage of 1896. By this point Conservative jaws were dropping. Nostitz was not finished. He offered his audience other heretical advice, viz. Social Democrats had to be readmitted to the Landtag and even invited onto its committees. A parliamentary majority that could not cope with "fifteen or twenty" Social Democrats, Nostitz declared, did not deserve to hold power. Without mentioning Mehnert by name, he declared that "political leaders have come to prominence in Saxony whose influence is not properly circumscribed by the responsibilities of public office." This brought Nostitz to the most celebrated passage in his speech: "It is generally known that this backstairs government [*Nebenregierung*] has brought to a head the rancor and bitterness felt . . . from the very highest notable to the simplest burgher . . . The Conservative Party will gain in inner strength to the same degree that it voluntarily relinquishes its artificial and illegitimate dominance."

The veil that hid the target of Nostitz's remarks was paper-thin. Mehnert did not hear this speech in person, but he conducted the chorus of criticism in the press that blasted Nostitz for his impertinence. Nostitz's use of the word *Nebenregierung* fueled the political storm that kept Saxons aflutter for months.<sup>72</sup> His remarks revealed how frayed relations had become between Saxony's state ministry and the Conservatives. By giving expression to views that other Conservatives shared but dared not voice in public, Nostitz's remarks also lay bare a schism in the Conservatives' Landtag caucus.<sup>73</sup> As one observer put it, Nostitz's speech and the furor it unleashed "dealt a blow to the influence and position of power held by the implacable, principled opponents of any suffrage reform in a liberal direction." It thereby created "a more favorable situation for debate of Hohenthal's suffrage proposal."<sup>74</sup> The Bavarian envoy Eduard von Montgelas reported that Nostitz "had, at a stroke, joined the highest ranks of Saxon politicians." Montgelas was wrong: Nostitz's career went into free-fall as a result of this speech. Montgelas nonetheless captured the significance of the occasion: "We stand at a turning point in the public life of Saxony. Even though the old funk has not been banished—far from it—one may still greet the fresh pulse of new life in the land with satisfaction and hope."<sup>75</sup>

Montgelas was steering close to wishful thinking here. For years he had hoped that Mehnert's wings would be clipped by a responsible statesman strong enough to do so. Yet another insider with impeccable conservative credentials supported Montgelas's conclusion. When the Saxon Conservatives held their annual general

<sup>71</sup> "Mit der Devise: 'Kampf gegen den Umsturz' locke man heute keinen Hund mehr vom Ofen."

<sup>72</sup> Pache, *Geschichte*, 100–32.

<sup>73</sup> See KHM Rumpelt (Dresden) to MdI, 5.8.07, SHStAD, MdI 5350. On worries about possible Cons. election losses, Montgelas, 5.10.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965.

<sup>74</sup> Acting Austrian envoy Gudenus, 31.7.07, HHStAV, PAV/53.

<sup>75</sup> Montgelas, 9.4.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965; LWRK, 211.

assembly on 27 September 1907 and used the occasion to rip into Nostitz for his impudence—Nostitz refused to recant—Dresden Regional Governor Anselm von Rumpelt came to his defense. As one of Saxony's most respected higher civil servants, he repeated Nostitz's claims "in a more pleasing form." As Hohenthal noted with some satisfaction, "Rumpelt really said exactly the same thing as Nostitz."<sup>76</sup> In the space of a few months, then, three of Saxony's highest civil servants had helped bring back to a boil public resentment against Mehnert, which had simmered since 1896. By also bringing into the open Mehnert's dominance over Finance Minister Rüger, who was trying behind the scenes to torpedo Hohenthal's suffrage plans, Montgelas reported that Nostitz had "belled the cat, so to speak."<sup>77</sup> Yet the question arises: Why should a man of Montgelas's social standing and political position *not* welcome the injection of new life into political conservatism if that helped it survive in a democratizing age?

Alfred von Nostitz's coming out as leader of reformist conservatism in Saxony had actually begun a few months earlier, in April 1907, when—with more circumspection than in July—he also addressed the Dresden Conservative Association. For a civil servant to advocate a more flexible brand of conservatism would have been unimaginable not long before. (In April, Dresden's mayor, Otto Beutler, also urged his colleagues to consider revising the party's program, outlining six points to bring it up to date.)<sup>78</sup> Nor did Nostitz remain *persona non grata* forever. After his shocking speech in July 1907 he was demoted and packed off to the Grand Duchy of Saxe-Weimar; but soon enough (in 1910) his rehabilitation began. He returned to Saxony as district governor first in Auerbach and then in Leipzig. In 1916 Nostitz was named Saxon envoy in Vienna. At that point Hohenthal's successor referred to Nostitz as "my best civil servant" and regretted that his July 1907 speech had had such a negative impact on his career.<sup>79</sup> Then for two weeks in October and November 1918 Nostitz served as Saxony's minister of culture—a sorry coda by one measure, a remarkable rebound by another.

Of greater importance is the echo Nostitz's words elicited elsewhere in Germany. In 1908 his mention of a "backstairs government" dovetailed with the national debate about illegitimate influences at the court of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Popular attention was being focused on the alleged *Nebenregierung* of Count Philipp zu Eulenburg and others implicated in the series of trials for homosexuality involving Kuno von Moltke and Maximilian Harden. Saxon liberals did not miss a beat in picking up on this theme. The National Liberals itemized the many abuses of power since Mehnert's Law had been passed in 1896—abuses perpetrated in the

<sup>76</sup> Montgelas, 5.10.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965. Hohenthal did not disavow either of his protégés.

<sup>77</sup> Montgelas, 1.11.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965. "Rüger is Mehnert's friend, [and] the suffrage reform rubs him the wrong way just as much as it does [Mehnert]; . . . Nostitz has belled the cat, so to speak, [and] his name has become a kind of battle cry."

<sup>78</sup> *Vaterl.*, 6.4.07; *DTZ*, 9/14.4.07; Montgelas (draft), 9.4.07, BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965.

<sup>79</sup> Government leader Vitzthum, cited in Montgelas, 7.3.16 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 974.

name of "Paul & Co., G.m.b.H."<sup>80</sup> and under the "Mehnert–Opitz–Oertel System."<sup>81</sup> Saxon industrialists and businessmen were heartened that their challenge to Conservative hegemony might now be supported by a government willing to set Saxony's parliamentary affairs on a footing more appropriate to its changed social and economic profile.

As if this were not enough to make Nostitz's remarks seem canny, in November 1908, at the opening of Saxony's "Suffrage Reform Landtag," Kaiser Wilhelm's *Daily Telegraph* "interview" convinced many Germans that men like Paul Mehnert were not the only ones who exerted influence unconstrained "by the responsibilities of public office." The new chairman of the Pan-German League, Heinrich Claß, jumped on this bandwagon. In November 1908 Claß addressed a general meeting of the League in Leipzig and declared that Germany's upper bureaucracy "suffered from the prevalent system of favoritism," which "must be abolished." As Claß put it, men, not favorites, were needed to halt "the progress of socialism, which was due to rottenness in high places."<sup>82</sup> As self-styled men of the future, Alfred von Nostitz and Heinrich Claß could hardly have been more different; but each in his way spoke for Germans who wanted to do away with the personal dominance of men like Paul Mehnert.

#### HOME STRETCH

Social Democrats found no reason to support Hohenthal's suffrage plan from the moment he announced it in July 1907. The government's proposal sought "to pass off as gold something that is not even cheap rubbish, to bring about *reconciliation* where it creates new antagonisms, to reap peace where it has sown a storm."<sup>83</sup> In *Die Neue Zeit*, the Saxon SPD leader Hermann Fleißner showed no sympathy for a plan that offered something to everyone: "The liberals get the plural system, the small reactionary corporative bodies (*Mittelstand*, national workers' associations, etc.) get proportional representation, Social Democracy gets a nugget of free suffrage, while the lion's share will go, as always, to the Conservatives."<sup>84</sup>

Some of the SPD's sharpest attacks targeted the partial election of Landtag deputies by local assemblies and councils. As socialist writers remarked, Saxony's other experiences with suffrage reform were all bad ones. Based on 310 questionnaires returned to the Saxon SPD's Central Committee, no fewer than seventy-nine suffrage reforms had been passed in Saxony between 1895 and 1905, all of them designed to disadvantage Social Democrats.<sup>85</sup> Because local suffrages were so skewed against Social Democrats, no socialist could possibly take his place among the forty Landtag deputies who would be elected by these bodies. Hermann

<sup>80</sup> I.e. limited liability company.

<sup>81</sup> Referring to Georg Oertel, the antisemitic editor of the BdL's *DTZ*, in which Mehnert's reports from Saxony appeared often. On Oertel, see ch. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Paraphrased in Findlay, 23.11.08 (draft), PRO, FO 215/55.

<sup>83</sup> *Sächsische Volksblatt* (Zwickau), 10.7.07 (original emphasis).

<sup>84</sup> Hermann Fleißner in *NZ* 25 (1907): 563.

<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche, *Gemeindepolitik* [1906], 48–56, also cited in Ritter, "Wahlrecht" (1990), 76.

Goldstein and other socialists knew that universal manhood suffrage for the Landtag—their maximal demand—could not be wrung from the government or the majority parties; but they were not willing to settle for the half loaf either. They told Hohenthal that he would look in vain for public support unless the government now gave back more than it had taken away in 1896.<sup>86</sup>

Hohenthal had “bad luck” in launching his suffrage reform at exactly the time (autumn 1907) that National Liberals and Conservatives were fighting each other more fiercely than ever before (worse was to come in 1909). Hohenthal was trying to draw into a straight flush, but he was not playing with an empty hand. Like the National Liberals, he used SPD protests to steer the majority parties toward compromise. He hinted more than once that he would resign if his plan were not approved. Or he might dissolve the Landtag and call new elections: as he put it, members of the non-socialist parties would be afraid to enter a campaign with empty hands.<sup>87</sup> Even Friedrich August III, true to his reputation for seeking the affection of his subjects, was determined not to agree to a suffrage reform unless it promised to quell popular unrest. In the end, neither threats nor promises carried the day for Hohenthal. Every card he played was trumped by the Conservatives, including the last hand in January 1909.

Suffrage reform arrived by a route that no one could have predicted in July 1907. During the initial deliberations of the Suffrage Committee, from December 1907 to March 1908, the “parties of order” successfully shrouded their deliberations in secrecy: they feared the consequences should ordinary Saxons learn that they were considering suffrages even more reactionary than the government’s proposal. Not even anonymous newspaper articles inspired by the government had much effect, as when one of them repeated the *Chemnitzer Tageblatt*’s complaint that the “steam-boiler” of the Committee’s deliberations and its “enthusiasm for work” needed stoking: both were on a low flame.<sup>88</sup> In some ways Hohenthal benefited from this period of calm.<sup>89</sup> The Social Democrats and left liberals expended more energy lobbying publicly for suffrage reform in Prussia than in Saxony during the first three months of 1908. But eventually Hohenthal lost patience. He told the parties in the spring of 1908 that they could no longer indulge in discussions of private members’ bills, which had occupied most of their attention up to that point. Instead he demanded that they debate the government’s own proposal, which they had ostentatiously ignored. To reinforce his demand, Hohenthal retired to Meran (Tirol) to recoup his health. He made it known that he expected to see progress on his plan before he returned from vacation.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in LWRK, 207f.

<sup>87</sup> These and following details drawn from Hohenlohe’s reports of 20.7.07, 27.9.07, 13.3.08, 13.4.08, 6.6.08, 19.11.08, 4.12.08, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; Braun’s reports of 29.5.07, 2/30.10.07, 2/27.11.07, 11.12.07, HHStAV, PAV/53; Braun, 16/21.3.08, 15.4.08, 15.6.08, 9.12.08, 22.1.09, 3.2.09, and Braun’s successor, Prince Karl Emil zu Fürstenberg, 19.5.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>88</sup> Text of an article sent to the *LZ* and the *DJ*, 7.12.08, in SHStAD, Mdi 5455.

<sup>89</sup> Hohenthal’s remarks cited in Findlay, 16.3.08 (draft), PRO, 215/55.

Conservative and National Liberal leaders responded by meeting secretly outside parliament. Soon they were colluding with Hohenthal's suffrage expert Heink to hammer out a deal. At this point Hohenthal's government began to lose control over the reform process. Only the fiction that Heink was pursuing a "personal initiative" allowed the government to hide behind the fig-leaf of constitutional propriety. Mehnert's hubris was impossible to ignore when he sent a note to Hohenthal in Meran, reporting on the majority parties' progress. Now all that was needed, wrote Mehnert triumphantly, was Hohenthal's "Amen" on their plan and Saxony's constitutional crisis would be over.<sup>90</sup>

Hohenthal would not go along. He returned from vacation and declared that he could not dispense the hoped-for benediction. The government and its statisticians first needed time to digest the political ramifications of the parties' proposed reform and the statistical likelihood of Saxon Social Democrats winning ten, fifteen, or more seats. Moreover, National Liberals and Conservatives still disagreed among themselves and were too vague about how rural and urban constituencies should be reapportioned.<sup>91</sup> Hohenthal complained that "proposals which were made to him in the morning were generally withdrawn or altered before the evening."<sup>92</sup>

So more than a simple "Amen" was needed after all. "Satisfying a larger part of the population" now lay further from the government's grasp than it had in the summer of 1907—or so it believed. What had happened? For one thing, mountains of statistical material amassed in previous years by the Royal Statistical Office had convinced Conservatives and National Liberals that they could judge which groups of voters were susceptible to the Social Democratic message.<sup>93</sup> Hohenthal and his advisors thought they knew better. In holding out against the plural suffrage, which he continued to describe as "plutocratic," Hohenthal believed that competing ideas about *Wahlkreisgeometrie*—how to gerrymander constituencies—had produced a gulf between the majority parties in the Landtag that was "unbridgeable."<sup>94</sup> Agreeing to their compromise "would shake the trust of the people in the energy of the government and fuel the courage of the opponents of any reform." Hohenthal therefore imposed a parliamentary adjournment from May to October 1908.

He was playing for time. Less clear is whether he imagined the parties would again take up the government's proposal in good faith or work out their remaining differences on their own. Hohenthal did not adjourn the Landtag because he thought the plural suffrage was too draconian or undemocratic. On the contrary, he argued that a new suffrage must retain the government's plan to include the election of some deputies—he was not going to dig in his heels on how many—elected by bodies of local government. He felt the plural suffrage did not provide "a defense against the flooding of the chamber by the Social Democrats."<sup>95</sup> Therefore he held fast to the idea of a hybrid suffrage where municipal assemblies and councils played a role. If he

<sup>90</sup> Braun, 15.4.08, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>91</sup> See Hohenthal to Friedrich August III, 16.8.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5455, and for the following.

<sup>92</sup> Reported in Findlay, 16.4.08 (draft), PRO, FO 215/55.

<sup>93</sup> The key file is SHStAD, Mdl 5491; see also Mdl 5454–55.

<sup>94</sup> Braun, 15.4.08, 15.6.08, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>95</sup> Braun, 15.4.08, HHStAV, PAV/54.

had asked his regional and district governors, Hohenthal would have heard that these local bodies were far less conservative than he supposed.<sup>96</sup> Could it be that Conservative and National Liberal deputies had their ear closer to the ground?

Conservatives and National Liberals continued to wrestle over details small and large during the summer of 1908, while the socialists kept up a constant barrage of propaganda demanding universal suffrage. Things looked no better in September 1908 than they had in April. Hohenthal reported to Friedrich August III that the majority parties, by opting for a plural suffrage, had produced “palpable despondency” among even the “right-thinking classes,” among which he included adherents of the Saxon *Mittelstand* movement. “This despondency,” Hohenthal told the king, “would work like a corrosive acid on the patriotic disposition of the Saxon people.”<sup>97</sup>

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As soon as the Landtag reconvened, the SPD organized mass demonstrations. The largest of these took place on Sunday, 1 November 1908. The number of protesters attending these meetings was estimated at 50,000 in Leipzig, 50,000 in Dresden, and 20,000 in Chemnitz. The rallies were well organized, the crowds remained calm, and no police action was needed.<sup>98</sup> In Leipzig alone, the SPD fielded some 300 organizers to ensure the demonstrations went as planned (see Figure 11.1).<sup>99</sup>

Protesters were instructed to gather at 9 a.m. in pre-designated watering holes and meet up on the *Messeplatz*—the open-air grounds of Leipzig’s trade fairs. SPD deputies and editors were allocated to six rostrums in the square: their speeches were to begin punctually at 10:30 a.m. They missed that target by only fifteen minutes. As Police Inspector Förstenberg noted, with no amplification only those listeners very close to the six speakers could hear their words; anyway, the bustle of the assembled masses was more interesting to participants than the speeches themselves. The “vote” on a common resolution was held shortly after 11:00 a.m.<sup>100</sup> The resolution had been printed beforehand as a flyer. At the appointed moment, a large sign with the word “VOTE” was held up on all six rostrums, and tens of thousands of hands shot skyward (Figure 11.2).

All this good behavior was caught on film by photographers, in contrast to the violence and bloodshed of December 1905, for which only a few blurry images exist.<sup>101</sup> What those photographs show is astonishing discipline—for instance in

<sup>96</sup> See e.g. KHM Welck’s “Jahresbericht . . . 1907” (excerpt), 8.3.08, and similar reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5455.

<sup>97</sup> Hohenthal to Friedrich Wilhelm III, 16.8.08, cited previously.

<sup>98</sup> Mdl to MdAA, 2.11.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5455, providing lower estimates but emphasizing organization, discipline, and calm.

<sup>99</sup> See Förstenberg, “Übersicht . . . 1908,” 2–8 (20.3.09), on the day’s events and the special SPD *Landesversammlung* held on 14.12.08; SHStAD, Mdl 10994.

<sup>100</sup> I am indebted to Simone Lässig for providing me with copies of SPD posters; see also LVZ, 30.10.08.

<sup>101</sup> See two further images from the same day’s protest in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. Also available as “Leipzig Demonstration against Three-Class Voting in Saxony (November 1, 1908),” GHDI vol. 5, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1698](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1698).





**Figure 11.1.** Suffrage Demonstrators on Leipzig's *Dittrichring*, 1 November 1908.

Source: *Wahlrechtsdemonstration in Leipzig am 1. November 1908. Ein Gedenkblatt für die arbeitende Klasse im Kampfe für das allgemeine gleiche geheime und direkte Wahlrecht in Sachsen 1896–1908* (Leipzig, 1908).



**Figure 11.2.** Suffrage Demonstration on Leipzig's *Meßplatz*, 1 November 1908.

Source: *Wahlrechtsdemonstration in Leipzig am 1. November 1908* (Leipzig, 1908).



**Figure 11.3.** Suffrage Demonstrators in Leipzig, 1 November 1908.

Source: *Wahlrechtsdemonstration in Leipzig am 1. November 1908* (Leipzig, 1908).

Leipzig, where protesters squeezed together like sardines to cross a narrow bridge (Figure 11.3).

The “voluntary discipline of the masses” in Leipzig in November 1908—as in November 1918 and the autumn of 1989—can be interpreted in more than one way. These Leipzig demonstrations were permitted only after SPD leaders promised to comply with police ordinances that limited the rallies to designated areas on the periphery of the city. Such ordinances made police supervision easier than if street processions and scattered protests erupted near public buildings in the city center. The symbolic victory of December 1905 could not be recreated in November 1908: too many of the SPD’s fellow travelers had drifted away. This had implications not just for Saxony. A writer in *Vorwärts* predicted that the new Saxon suffrage would rekindle the fire under suffrage reform in Prussia. It is true that the Prussian reform movement of 1909–10 exceeded Saxony’s in intensity and sheer numbers. But culturally and politically, the Saxon experience was more innovative.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>102</sup> As argued convincingly in LWRK, 231. Cf. Braun, 22.1.09, HHStAV, PAV/54: “It is still very difficult for state authorities to find the golden mean between patient accommodation and energetic intervention.”

## DEMOCRACY IN DISAPPEARING INK

Here is the constituency arrangement you requested. Things can be changed and moved around, of course, but no matter how one does it, a positive, favorable result cannot by any means be predicted, because the whole plural suffrage system is a leap in the dark, and one has no clue what its effect will actually be. I have noted my political weather forecast with red pencil on each constituency numeral; but correctly or not? *Qui vivra verra!*<sup>103</sup>

—Leipzig City Counselor Leo Ludwig-Wolf to Privy  
Counselor Georg Heink, 5 September 1908<sup>104</sup>

Pizarro (*to the officers*):

Three sentries to the ramparts, six to the drawbridge . . .

Where are the despatches?

Rocco:

Here.

Pizarro (*opens the papers, looks through them*):

More recommendations! More reproaches!

—*Fidelio*, opera by Ludwig van Beethoven (Opus 72),  
act 1, scene 5, recitative

If we feel vexed by the question of why Hohenthal held out so dogmatically in favor of his preferred suffrage reform, we should take heart that contemporaries found it just as hard to disentangle the ramifications of complex and untried suffrages. Like us, they understood that suffrage reform does not revolve around only technicalities—“*wretched details*.” Suffrage laws determine how power is shared and how social pressures can be transmitted through parliaments upward to the state.

One scholar has argued that the Saxon government and the majority parties in the Landtag, by engaging in a protracted battle over a new suffrage, generated tensions and dynamics that increased the pace of democratization and bolstered the legitimacy of representative institutions. According to this interpretation, suffrage reform in Saxony forced all parties to refine the art of balancing economic interests and ideological imperatives. In the process they learned one lesson of democracy—how to build consensus within the existing parliamentary system.<sup>105</sup>

Although this viewpoint rightly underscores the reciprocal relationship between suffrage reform movements and Germany’s social democratization, when we consider the issue of political democratization, an alternative explanation is persuasive. Hohenthal and Heink were willing to see Social Democrats enter a reformed Landtag in limited numbers. They nevertheless remained steadfast in pursuing an anti-democratic course. This was a course on which Saxony and Germany had embarked in the 1860s. Mirroring bourgeois views, Hohenthal and Heink were determined not

<sup>103</sup> “Time will tell!” or “Wait and see!”

<sup>104</sup> SHStAD, MdI 5489. Ludwig-Wolf sent two schemes dividing Leipzig into 6 and 7 LT WKs.

<sup>105</sup> This is the conclusion reached by the foremost expert on the subject: LWRK, esp. 214.

to allow socialists close to the levers of power—ever. In a confidential memorandum of 1 November 1906, Heink stated this position explicitly.<sup>106</sup> His long-term perspective on suffrage reform ran from 1868 *through* 1896 to 1909.

The Landtag suffrage law of 3 December 1868 suffered from two maladies. It did not protect the state-supporting elements of the second chamber against a possible majority of the enemies of the state, and it had the other disadvantage, that the minorities in individual constituencies were not able to exercise their rights . . .

The law of 28 March 1896 offered . . . a corrective for the first . . . but it did not eliminate the second . . . and to these old maladies it added two more . . . First, the circumstance that voters in the third [voting] division appeared to be condemned to powerlessness and, second, the fact that the voters could not vote directly for deputies but rather [did so] only through delegates who . . . were demeaned to mere ballot-carriers.

It will therefore be the job of a new electoral law to eliminate these three maladies from the world and thereby *not only not sacrifice what was won through the law of 28 March 1896 but, on the contrary, better to secure it.*

It appears very necessary to keep this *single aim* clearly in sight and not be diverted from it by all sorts of proposals and discussions. Otherwise one can too easily make the mistake of trying to discover an absolutely fair electoral system that will absolutely satisfy everyone . . .

The *loyal* population . . . demands nothing other than to be freed from the three maladies already cited.

*To pay heed to the disloyal population, however, would be the most foolhardy thing the government could do.* For this disloyal population wants the general, equal, secret, and direct suffrage for male and female persons, and if it had this, it would want to reduce the voting age and would not rest until it had implemented its demands not only for elections to the Landtag but also for municipal, rural, district, and all other elections . . .

Demands for the implementation of socialist principles naturally cannot be fulfilled. However, if the government wanted to reject every reform that Social Democracy agrees with, it would very quickly paralyze itself and do enormous damage. In the legislative process, therefore, one must pay absolutely no attention whatsoever, one way or the other, to whether the Social Democrats agree or disagree with the proposed [voting] schemes.

There is no doubt that Hohenthal and Heink wanted to solve the suffrage reform crisis in a way that would resurrect some popular legitimacy for the Saxon Landtag—just as government leader Richard von Friesen and Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz had in 1866–68. In both eras, these civil servants had patents of nobility but they served mainly bourgeois interests. Hohenthal and Heink foresaw a reformed Landtag in which only one “loyal” part of the Saxon people would be represented, and on a limited basis, for years to come. At a time when they (correctly) estimated that more than 50 percent of Saxon voters supported Social Democracy, they did not accept even the trappings of democracy, let alone its fundamental premise.

<sup>106</sup> Heink memorandum, 1.11.06, SHStAD, MdI 5455 (emphasis added, except original emphasis on “loyal”).

## OPENING THE FLOODGATES?

Ironically, Saxony's Royal Statistical Office compiled such comprehensive election data from 1897 through 1909 that it could answer almost as many questions as Landtag deputies could pose. Only some of those answers offer new insight into the broad-gauged effect of Saxon suffrage reforms in 1868, 1896, and 1909. The outcome of the 1909 Landtag election will be considered in the next chapter. Here we consider three kinds of election *inputs*: (1) the changing physiognomy of the Saxon electorate; (2) the changing ways in which ballots translated into Landtag seats; and (3) the gap—did it widen or shrink?—between the socio-economic profile of the Saxon population and its representation in the Landtag.

- (1) Who was included or excluded from Landtag voting depended mainly on the three-Mark tax threshold after 1868, the three-class voting system after 1896, and the counting of ballots cast by each voter under the plural suffrage of 1909. Under the 1896 and 1909 suffrage regimes, we can measure the effective weight of ballots cast by one social group compared to another. Such groups were defined by the holding of land or other property, tax exposure, citizenship and residency, as well as by type of economic activity, level of education, and age. If we drill down one more layer—we could go further, but with diminishing returns—we can address questions about equity at the local level. Three categories of Saxon society were always differentiated from one another electorally: voters living in the big cities, those in other cities and towns, and those in the countryside.
- (2) We have seen that the social groups represented by all political parties except the SPD believed that the principle of “one man, one vote” would flood Saxony's parliament with socialists. Especially after 1903, these parties and the government proposed ways to prevent such a flood. Because of the sheer number of suffrage systems they proposed, the path leading to a plural suffrage in the spring of 1909 was strewn with wrong turns and dead ends. Its rhetoric was apocalyptic or inane by turns. Social Democrats and their enemies never found common ground about what kind of electoral law might be genuinely representative of Saxon society. Once a plural suffrage emerged as the most likely solution to Saxony's political crisis, the weighting of ballots according to social rank and achievement constituted a fundamental principle of good governance, but it was a principle that Social Democrats could never endorse.
- (3) What features were thought to distinguish a genuinely “representative” suffrage? Socio-economic solidarities? Individual rights? Capacity? Learning? Achievement? Depending on the context, all these criteria were cited as indicators of groups and individuals who could reasonably be assumed to be politically judicious—who would know what was best for their country. Judiciousness was ascribed to men, and only men, of higher learning, greater affluence, extended residency, business experience, or mere longevity (the extra “age” ballot). Such men were also presumed to have the largest stake in

the existing order. But what about other Saxons, perhaps younger, perhaps more eager, certainly less privileged: should they too be allowed to shape their own future? If their voices were not heard directly in Saxony's parliament, could they still be represented there by a voting law that, if not democratic, was more inclusive than the previous one? And why at this time were women never seriously considered as suitable voters?<sup>107</sup>

Astonishingly, these questions were rarely posed while suffrage reform was being debated. One reason may be that the Saxon government, in the preamble to its suffrage proposal of July 1907, had made them so explicit that they needed no elaboration. The government went the extra mile by citing Count Mirabeau and Albert Schäffle, among others, to signal that its proposal was based on sound constitutional theory. Saxony's lower house, it wrote, "like any good representative body," must fulfill "two fundamental obligations." First, it must "genuinely represent *everything* in the populous that needs to be represented." Second, "this must happen through intelligent and independent men in such a way that it serves as a guarantee that the chamber exercises its important competencies for the welfare of the *entire* population."<sup>108</sup>

Another reason parliamentarians side-stepped fundamental questions is that veiled arguments served the "state-supporting" deputies well. They were trying to devise a suffrage that would send men like themselves to a future Landtag. That was the best way they knew to represent what deserved to be represented and to fortify the status quo. Hohenthal was personally repulsed that members of the lower chamber and of the Suffrage Committee had "based all their decisions on nothing other than the worry—elevated to a principle and a *Leitmotif*—to secure their own re-election."<sup>109</sup> But how else could the "parties of order" serve the good cause? Certainly not by dismantling (or even questioning) bulwarks that already existed to hold back "revolutionaries" who, they believed, had dedicated themselves to overthrowing the state and its governing classes.

Each type of electoral input deserves brief elaboration.

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(1) The *size* of the Saxon electorate was the least contentious aspect of the 1909 suffrage reform: it changed hardly at all. When the three-class suffrage was introduced in 1896, the tax threshold of three Marks was discarded. The number of

<sup>107</sup> Early in the Suffrage Committee's deliberations, male gender became one of the requirements for enfranchisement; this replaced negative wording in the suffrage laws of 1848 and 1896 that had denied women—along with criminals, bankrupts, those on poor relief, and the (mentally) disabled—the right to vote; Bericht 487, 11; Bericht 549, 101. On 1.12.07 a meeting of the Saxon Association for Women's Suffrage was addressed by Katharine Scheven. It protested against the inclusion of women among those debarred from voting when it wrote to the II.K., 10.1.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5467. Scheven had founded a Dresden chapter of the International Abolitionist Federation in 1902. See also Chapters 12 and 13.

<sup>108</sup> "Entwurf" (1907), cited previously.

<sup>109</sup> Mdl to MdAA, 2.11.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5455. Also Pr. envoy Hohenlohe, 4.12.08, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

Table 11.1. Enfranchised Electors in Saxony: Landtag and Reichstag Elections, 1869–1912

Election year	Census year	Saxon population	Eligible electors in Saxony		Saxon turnout (%)	Reich turnout (%)
			(no.)	(% of pop.)		
Saxon Landtag						
1869	1869	2,476,100	244,594	9.9	39.8	
1889/1891/1893	1890	3,502,684	493,832	14.1	43.5/53.6/50.7	
1895	1895	3,755,802	536,000	14.3	51.2	
1897/1899/1901	1900	4,202,216	659,863	15.7	38.9/29.8/39.6	
1903/1905/1907	1905	4,476,670	729,944	16.3	38.9/42.8/48.3	
1909		4,715,118	773,116	16.4	82.6	
German Reichstag						
1871	1871	2,556,244	472,874	19.4	45.1	51.0
1890	1885	3,182,000	701,230	22.0	82.0	71.6
1893	1890	3,503,000	742,636	21.2	79.6	72.5
1898	1895	3,788,000	822,050	21.2	73.9	68.1
1903	1900	4,202,216	909,846	21.7	83.0	76.1
1907	1905	4,476,670	965,658	21.6	89.7	84.7
1909		4,715,118	1,017,500	21.6	—	—
1912	1910	4,806,661	1,055,921	21.9	88.8	84.9

*Note:* Estimated figures in italics. The estimated Saxon population in 1909 includes four-fifths of the increase between the censuses of 1905 and 1910. In 1897–1901, the proportion of the population eligible to vote in Landtag elections was higher in Prussia (19% in 1898) than in Saxony (15.7 percent).

*Sources:* ZSSL (1905, 1909/10); SBDR 1907/09, Anlagen 573, 3579; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 38 (1910): 292; *ibid.* 40 (1912): 275; *ibid.* 41 (1913): 283–5; *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* 250 (1912): 73; *SParl*; SLTW; Schröder, “Landtagswahlen”; Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” 88; Ritter, “Wahlen”; RWA. Some figures estimated or corrected by the author.

eligible electors rose from about 536,000 to almost 660,000.<sup>110</sup> After a slow increase commensurate with Saxony’s rising population, by 1907 a total of 730,000 Saxons were entitled to vote—equal to 16.3 percent of Saxony’s total population (compared to about 10 percent in 1869). For the election of October 1909 under the new suffrage, about 773,000 Saxons (16.2 percent) were entitled to vote, among a population that had grown to almost 4.8 million.<sup>111</sup> Table 11.1 illustrates the changing number and proportion of Saxons eligible to vote in Landtag and Reichstag elections, from 1869 to 1912. In the Reichstag elections of January 1907, about 966,000 Saxon men (21.6 percent of the total population) were eligible to vote.<sup>112</sup> Almost 200,000 *fewer* Saxons were eligible to vote for their

<sup>110</sup> ZSSL 1909, 11, 170. Following figures have been rounded.

<sup>111</sup> This represented a slight decline in the proportion of enfranchised Saxons, despite the fact that an estimated 7,000–9,000 potential voters were excluded because they were categorized as itinerant workers. ZSSL 1909, 223; *SParl*, 67. Unfortunately the 1905 census data must be used for comparison.

<sup>112</sup> Among Saxon males over twenty-five, about 71 percent were eligible in 1900 to vote in LT elections; this had risen to about 76 percent by 1909.

own Landtag in October 1909. Put another way: about one-quarter of Saxon Reichstag voters still could not vote in Landtag elections.

(2) It is less easy to describe how the *shape* of the Saxon electorate changed when the three-class suffrage was replaced by plural voting in 1909. Scholars have used different yardsticks to measure how Saxon electors were grouped in different categories, which is also a measure of electoral inequality according to particular criteria. (Thus they have compared apples and oranges, with lemons mixed in, and we must do the same.) Under the 1896 three-class suffrage, the division of electors in the entire kingdom hid striking disparities based on age, profession, and whether one lived in one of the large cities, other urban areas, or in the countryside. Many such disparities remained after the three-class suffrage was abolished.

Before 1909, relatively fewer Saxons living in Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz were enfranchised (13.8 percent) than their fellow electors in the countryside (16.7 percent).<sup>113</sup> After the reform, the disparity was about the same. By another measure we can see, first, why National Liberals wanted city dwellers to be given their due and, second, how the Conservatives' successful opposition left the Saxon electorate skewed. The 1909 reform increased the total number of Landtag seats from eighty-two to ninety-one. In the process, new constituencies were created for both urban *and* rural areas. Now twenty deputies were elected in the five largest cities, twenty-three in "other urban" areas, and forty-eight (previously forty-five) in rural areas. Because many constituency boundaries were not redrawn, the total and the relative number of electors living in each type of constituency remained vastly uneven. Table 11.2 illustrates these disparities, of

**Table 11.2.** Enfranchised Population by Constituency Type: Saxon Landtag, 1909

Constituency type (no.)	Total population (no.)	Enfranchised population (no.)	Enfranchised population (%)	Population per constituency (avg.) (no.)	Enfranchised population per constituency (avg.) (no.)
Large cities (20)	1,513,426	234,975	15.5	75,671	11,749
Other urban (23)	979,792	172,550	17.6	42,600	7,502
Rural (48)	1,973,540	365,591	18.5	41,115	7,616
Total Saxony (91)	4,466,758	773,116	17.3	49,085	8,496

*Notes:* Based on census of 1905 and voters' lists of 1909; actual population in 1909 would show lower rates of enfranchisement. Large City constituencies: Dresden (7), Leipzig (7), Chemnitz (4), Zwickau (1), Plauen (1).

*Sources:* ZSSL 1909, 222f. Some figures calculated by the author.

<sup>113</sup> In 1897–1901; RWA, 175. Here and elsewhere, I refer to "electors"—enfranchised (*stimmberechte*) persons *eligible* to vote in elections—to distinguish them from voters (*Wähler*) who actually cast a ballot. Such "electors" have nothing to do with the "delegates" (*Wahlmänner*) who served an intermediary function between voters (*Urwähler*) and parliamentary deputies (*Abgeordnete*) under indirect three-class voting systems.



which the most important is the number of Landtag deputies representing each type of riding. Approximately 1.51 million Saxons in the largest cities were represented by twenty deputies; fewer than one million in other urban areas were represented by twenty-three deputies; and about two million Saxons living in the countryside could rely on forty-eight deputies—well over half the Landtag—to represent their interests. Put another way, and disregarding the allotment of multiple ballots, every vote cast by a rural voter counted for more than 1.5 times as much as the vote of a big-city resident.

Even readers familiar with the art of gerrymandering might not appreciate that the suffrage of 1909 carried forward the same combination of territorial and demographic disparities that had privileged rural voters since 1868. Of course Social Democrats found some support in the countryside, as Conservatives did in the cities. However, the cries of those who denounced these inequities fell on deaf ears. Reformers who advocated doing away with the distinction between urban and rural ridings never got a serious hearing from Conservatives.

(3) The allocation of multiple ballots necessarily affected these electoral disparities. It exacerbated them in some ways and mitigated them in others. From 1897 to 1907, 80.7 percent of electors in the kingdom were grouped in the third, least privileged voting class, 15.8 percent in the second class, 3.4 percent in the first. Disparities were also evident among different age cohorts. As for the distribution of electors according to occupation and degree of independence, one can see why some groups had more reason than others to lobby for change.<sup>114</sup> Consider artisans who were independent or self-employed. After 1896, only 17.7 percent of self-employed artisans were eligible to vote in Class I or Class II. After the reform of 1909, Saxon statisticians used different occupational categories and subcategories. But among independent or self-employed electors in two economic sectors—industry, and trade and transportation—those who were privileged enough to cast either three or four ballots were 36.9 percent and 23.5 percent of this section of the electorate, respectively. After the 1909 suffrage reform, 13.6 percent of all workers were eligible to cast three ballots and 2.4 percent were eligible to cast four. Nevertheless, even under the new suffrage, 77.1 percent of working-class electors were granted only one ballot.

Statistics gathered under the three-class suffrage regime document other kinds of inequity that fed bourgeois dissatisfaction and working-class outrage; but it is time to consider how the framers of the new suffrage predicted the number of votes and Landtag seats Social Democrats would win in the future. These mis/calculations go to the heart of the question about how Germans thought democracy could be held at bay. They also document with remarkable precision the divisions among social groups that civil servants believed were “state-supporting” or tainted by Social Democracy. Whether in complex calculations or simple tables, the plans drawn up by Hohenthal’s advisors reveal not only that social rank and political reliability were

<sup>114</sup> See RWA, 178.

to be rewarded, but also *how* they were to be rewarded. Conversely, these plans reveal how political heretics were to be disadvantaged—also in the name of fairness.

#### AT THE GREEN TABLE (REDUX)

While he was still drafting the government's suffrage plan of 1907, and at a time when Mehnert still doubted his conservative credentials, Georg Heink explained to Hohenthal why the government should include proportional representation and a maximum of two ballots per voter in its legislation. On the first point, Heink believed proportional representation would benefit the middle classes and the government itself. On the second point, Heink's determination to limit Social Democratic representation in the Landtag could not have been spelled out more clearly.<sup>115</sup>

Proportional representation, Heink wrote in November 1906, would have the immediate benefit of eliminating the possibility of run-off elections and the "unnatural electoral pacts" they encouraged. It would also limit the "excessive power" of the "large and extreme parties." PR would serve the interests of voters whose political viewpoints were not represented by any candidate in a particular constituency ("e.g. the Protestant workers associations"). By helping smaller parties survive, PR would also relieve Hohenthal's government from pressure exerted by the Conservatives and National Liberals. "For countries ruled by parliament," wrote Heink, "it might be beneficial to have powerfully strong parties, [but] in my view, for our monarchical state, not yet—on the one hand, because [such parties] are uncomfortable for the government and, on the other hand, because their disproportionate influence over the minorities in the country make [those minorities] dissatisfied." Proportional representation fell from the negotiating table at a late stage of the suffrage debate. Exactly why we cannot say. In December 1908 Heink and Würzburger appear to have calculated that introducing PR might give the Social Democrats as many as thirty-six seats in the new Landtag.<sup>116</sup> Yet mysteriously, around that same time, Heink still believed that proportional representation was essential. He put it this way: "A plural system *without* proportional representation is like a steam boiler without a safety valve. If this safety valve, through which the dissatisfaction of the artificially created minorities can be released, is missing, the danger of an explosion is certain to arise."<sup>117</sup>

Giving a second ballot—and no more—to electors who enjoyed preferment because of property or education would, according to Heink, also have a beneficial result. In November 1906 Heink had made clear the result he sought: "the voters . . . who mostly vote Social Democratic [will have] only one ballot, [whereas]

<sup>115</sup> For the following, Heink memorandum, 1.11.06, SHStAD, Mdl 5455.

<sup>116</sup> Würzburger to Mdl, 15.12.08, with Heink's handwritten calculations, SHStAD, Mdl 5491. Heink's rationale for rejecting PR was concise: "With *proportional* voting, 54 deputies of order and 36 deputies of socialism."

<sup>117</sup> Würzburger to Mdl, 19.12.08, with Heink's and Reg.-Rat Dr. Adolph's handwritten marginalia dated 22.12.08 and 7.1.09, respectively; SHStAD, Mdl 5491. Heink was bombarded by unsolicited proposals for PR systems: see e.g. Max Schneider to Hohenthal, 27.5.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5469, and Schneider, *Untersuchung*.

the voters of all the electoral classes who mainly do not vote Social Democratic will each have two ballots.” He continued: “Now, because about 300,000 of the roughly 660,000 eligible Saxons electors do not belong to the [privileged] categories and will vote Social Democratic, [those] 300,000 Social Democratic ballots will stand against  $2 \times 360,00 = 720,000$  non-Social Democratic ballots. If one further reckons with the possibility that, among voters with two ballots, roughly another 60,000 are Social Democrats, then even in the worst possible case, 600,000 non-Social Democratic ballots will remain against 420,000 Social Democratic ballots. That would mean 14 Social Democrats among 84 deputies—in other words, a situation that is still tolerable.”<sup>118</sup>

Statements like this speak clearly: Hohenthal’s advisors were pre-programmed to regard the Social Democratic danger in binary terms. For the last three elections under the old suffrage, from 1903 to 1907, the government did not even bother to tabulate the votes won by all parties. It tabulated only socialist and non-socialist votes, putting them in two columns side by side on the page. This stark division was not merely a matter of administrative convenience. The election results were published this way too, reinforcing the public’s sense of “us against them.”<sup>119</sup>

By December 1908, Hohenthal’s advisors based their calculations on the premise that more than 50 percent of all electors would support the Social Democrats.<sup>120</sup> By the time the upper chamber was deliberating the final phase of reform in the second week of January 1909, the director of Saxony’s Statistical Office, Eugen Würzburger, had drawn up two scenarios. The first one depicted the likely result of plural voting if 55–56 percent of eligible voters sympathized with Social Democracy. After some consideration, which turned out to be correct, this estimate was lowered to the 52–53 percent range. Under each scenario, Würzburger and Heink calculated how many total ballots would be cast for the socialist and non-socialist parties by electors who were eligible to cast one, two, three, or four ballots in all. A love of numbers, rudimentary knowledge of German, and an understanding of what certain income and property qualifications really said about an elector—these are all needed to parse the statistical tables these men produced. Sufficient for our purpose are their principal conclusions.<sup>121</sup> But note: their premises as well as their final calculations were accepted as reliable by the members of the Suffrage Committee.

<sup>118</sup> Heink memorandum, 1.11.06, SHStAD, Mdl 5455. In a ninety-one-seat LT, this would equate to fifteen SPD deputies.

<sup>119</sup> “Die Urwahlen . . . 1903 bis 1907,” ZSSL 54, no. 2 (1908): 168–71; see corrected proof for the next issue of the ZSSL and a *Sonderabdruck aus dem Statistischen Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 36 (1908): 1–5, with Würzburger to Heink, 12.11.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5350. According to this update, the SPD’s share of the vote declined over the three elections of 1903, 1905, and 1907 from 50.4 percent to 47.4 percent to 43.8 percent. Meanwhile turnout rates increased, from 38.9 percent to 42.8 percent to 48.3 percent. This inverse relationship supported SPD views that no progress was possible under the three-class suffrage.

<sup>120</sup> This general estimate subsumed dozens of finer calculations that were in flux during 1908.

<sup>121</sup> See the figure on “Expected Support for Social Democracy, by Number of Ballots Awarded, 1909.” To make clear the criteria used to award extra ballots, this figure has been left in the original German. “Tabelle B” (handwritten), Anlage to Dr. Würzburger to Mdl, 8.1.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5491. The principal categories are translated into English in an accompanying figure. Both in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

At the top of his table, Würzburger listed all the sub-categories of preferment under a plural suffrage that would award an elector four ballots. Based on data gathered under the three-class suffrage regime (1896–1907), he estimated how many electors would likely belong to each subgroup and what proportion of them “could be assumed to be Social Democratic voters.” Below that he listed the same sub-categories that would give an elector three or two ballots. In each case, he separated out electors who got an extra ballot only because they were over fifty years old. At the bottom of his table, Würzburger estimated the number of one-ballot electors and their likelihood of voting socialist. On the right side of his table, he multiplied the number of electors in each category by the number of ballots they were eligible to cast, as a means of estimating the total number of ballots likely to be cast for non-socialist and socialist candidates when the first election was held under the new suffrage. The subcategory of electors who were given preferment purely on the basis of their taxable income can be cited as a reading example from this table. According to Würzburger, only 3 percent of four-ballot electors with an annual income over 2,800 Marks would vote for the SPD; 5 percent of three-ballot electors with incomes over 2,200 Marks would do the same. Further down Würzburger’s table, the likelihood of support for the socialists jumped. Eighteen percent of two-ballot electors with incomes over 1,600 Marks would vote for the SPD, whereas 40 percent of electors who had a second ballot only because they were over fifty years old would do so. Among electors who had only a single ballot to cast, fully 82 percent were expected to vote for the “party of revolution.”

What did this mean in terms of *total* ballots cast for and against the Social Democrats? (That is the way Hohenthal’s suffrage advisors posed the question.) On the premise that 52–53 percent of all *voters* would support the SPD, Würzburger calculated that 34.5 percent of all *ballots* would go to socialist candidates. As noted already, Würzburger and Heink estimated that under the plural suffrage, the SPD would win approximately fifteen of ninety-one seats in the reformed Landtag. In fact, from that outcome—no more than fifteen SPD seats—they reverse engineered plural suffrage schemes to produce the desired result. The Suffrage Committee did the same thing.

The remarkable precision with which Würzburger and Heink believed they could estimate Social Democratic sympathies among different groups became more evident when they drew up a statistical overview of their findings. It is presented in Table 11.3. This time, they did not divide up electors according to the number of ballots they had to cast. Instead they listed them according to occupational categories used at the time. Within each category, they added subdivisions according to the thresholds for preferment already agreed upon by the Suffrage Committee. These included three income thresholds (1,600, 2,200, and 2,800 Marks), one salary threshold (1,600 Marks), one land ownership threshold (4 hectares), and the age threshold (forty-five years). (A final decision was pending about whether a second ballot would be awarded at age forty-five or fifty.) As Table 11.3 shows, these suffrage experts again listed the likelihood that electors in each sub-category would vote socialist.

**Table 11.3.** Expected Support for Social Democracy, by Occupation, Property, Income, Age, 1908

Sub-category	Occupational Category	Estimated number [of eligible electors]	Assumed percentage [of] Social Democratic [electors]
<b>I. Self-Employed in Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, and Fishing</b>			
1	Over 4 [hectares], over 2,200 [Marks] income, and over 45 years old	4,134	5
2	Over 4 ha, over 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	6,202	5
3	Over 4 ha, under 2,200 M. income, and over 45 years old	10,133	8
4	Over 4 ha, under 2,200 M. income, and under 45 years old	15,200	10
5	Under 4 ha, over 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	9,561	8
6	Under 4 ha, over 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	14,342	10
<b>II. Civil Servants, Clergy, Teachers</b>			
7	Over 1,600 M salary, over 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	7,449	5
8	Over 1,600 M salary, over 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	11,174	7
9	Over 1,600 M salary, under 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	4,328	10
10	Over 1,600 M salary, under 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	6,492	10
11	Under 1,600 M salary and over 45 years old	12,047	11
12	Under 1,600 M salary and under 45 years old	18,072	12
<b>III. Lawyers, Doctors, Artists, Private Scholars, and other Free Professions</b>			
13	Over 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	1,018	3
14	Over 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	1,528	4
15	Under 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	1,142	6
16	Under 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	1,714	6
<b>IV. Salaried Employees in Industry, Business, Trade and Commerce, Agriculture and Forestry, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, and Fishing</b>			
17	Over 1,600 M salary, over 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	3,130	10
18	Over 1,600 M salary, over 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	4,695	10
19	Over 1,600 M salary, under 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	2,466	11
20	Over 1,600 M salary, under 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	3,700	12
21	Under 1,600 M salary and over 45 years old	4,371	13
22	Under 1,600 M salary and under 45 years old	6,558	15

## V. Self-Employed in Trade and Business

23	Over 1,600 M, over 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	16,004	20
24	Over 1,600 M, over 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	24,007	20
25	Over 1,600 M, under 2,200 M income, and over 45 years old	7,046	25
26	Over 1,600 M, under 2,200 M income, and under 45 years old	10,570	30
27	Under 1,600 M income and over 45 years old	40,781	40
28	Under 1,600 M income and under 45 years old	61,171	55

## VI. Workers, Household Servants

29	Over 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	650	70
30	Over 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	1,480	75
31	Under 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	95,597	85
32	Under 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	217,575	92

## VII. Without Profession

33	Over 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	3,258	10
34	Over 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	4,887	10
35	Under 2,200 M income and over 45 years old	9,665	10
36	Under 2,200 M income and under 45 years old	14,498	15

*Notes:* The Director of Saxony's Royal Statistical Office, Eugen Würzburger, supplied this table to aid "the calculated distribution of votes among the parties according to the motions of the [National Liberal] minority of the Suffrage Committee" (Berichte etc. der II. Kammer Nr. 550, pp. 16f.) The "assumed percentages" of "supporters of Social Democracy," he noted, were in accord with a previous calculation by the MdI. The following translations were used: Occupational Category for *Personengruppe*; Self-Employed for *Selbständig*; Civil Servants for *Beamte*; Business for *Gewerbe*; Without Profession for *ohne Beruf*. The total no. of persons estimated here is 656,645, that is, close to the number of eligible Landtag electors in 1897–1901 but 116,000 fewer than were eligible in 1909.

*Source:* Beilage to Würzburger to MdI, 14.12.08, SHStAD, MdI 5491, f. 147–8.

These men concluded that a significant number of non-workers would support Social Democracy. They believed, for example, that 10 percent of civil servants with annual salaries under 2,200 Marks would vote socialist; 25–30 percent of businessmen with similar incomes would do the same. Thirty-eight percent of electors with only the second "age" ballot would vote socialist, as would 92 percent of workers and household servants who had just one ballot to cast.<sup>122</sup>

These experts' predictions were far from the mark on one count but remarkably accurate on two others. On the one hand, not fifteen but rather twenty-five Social Democrats were elected to the Landtag in October 1909. How that outcome occurred and why it produced such amazement will be considered in the next chapter. On the other hand, Heink and Würzburger came very close to predicting the proportion of eligible electors who would support the SPD and the (weighted)

<sup>122</sup> Some figures from Würzburger to MdI, 8.1.09, with Heink's marginalia; SHStAD, MdI 5491. Heink anticipated the following composition of a reformed LT (with eighty-seven seats): "38 Kons[ervativen], 19 National[liberalen], 15 Sozial[demokraten], 11 Fraglichen, 3 [LL] Freisinn, 1 [AS] Reform." Note the designation of eleven "toss-up" (*fraglich*) seats.

total number of ballots they would cast. Almost half a million Saxons—53.8 percent of all voters—supported Social Democrats in 1909. This demonstrates that Würzburger and Heink were correct to revise their estimate of SPD supporters downward between November 1908 and January 1909.

As expected, almost half (46 percent) of all Social Democratic supporters were entitled to cast only one ballot. Eight percent of Saxon voters privileged enough to cast four ballots supported a socialist. As a result, the SPD won only 38.7 percent of all ballots cast—a figure close to these men's second overall estimate (34.5 percent) and even closer to their first (36.2 percent). In other words, Hohenthal's experts came very close to predicting how the plural suffrage would transform a majority of SPD voters into a minority of SPD ballots. For this reason we can be confident that they were *broadly* correct when they estimated what proportion of various social groups would fail to pass the test of reliability and would vote socialist.

From Table 11.3 we see that these suffrage experts put lawyers, doctors, artists, and other "free professionals" (Category III, line 13) at the top of their "reliability scale." At the bottom of the "reliability scale" we find younger, less well-paid workers and domestic servants (Category VI/32). Of all thirty-six categories they considered, Category VI/32 was by far the most numerous. It held 217,575 eligible electors—one-third of all enfranchised Saxons.

Hohenthal's suffrage experts assumed that younger and less affluent voters in each social group would be more likely to vote for the SPD. No surprise there. Yet they worried about the "reliability" of other groups. Poorly paid civil servants in Category II (including, for example, railway workers), clerics, and teachers represented one such worry. Salaried employees (Category IV) in the lower ranks of almost all occupations (including, for example, shop clerks and other members of the new *Mittelstand*), though few in number, would be even more likely to vote for an SPD candidate.

Particularly worrisome to Hohenthal's experts—and the majority parties—were self-employed members of Category V who plied some sort of trade or business (most typically shopkeepers, small businessmen, and artisans). This was the core of the old *Mittelstand*, for whose votes all parties, including the SPD, had been fighting vigorously since the 1880s. Depending on income and age, the percentage of voters in Category V who were expected to support the SPD ranged from a low of 20 percent to a high of 55 percent (Categories V/23 and V/28, respectively). No less important, the most likely SPD supporters among self-employed merchants or businessmen significantly outnumbered those whose "disloyalty" might be considered acceptable under a plural suffrage. About 47,000 Saxons were included in Categories V/23, V/24, and V/25: their expected support for Social Democrats lay in the 20–25 percent range. By contrast, Categories V/26 to V/28 included over 112,000 Saxons—more than three times as many—whose likelihood of voting SPD was estimated at 30, 40, or 55 percent. Category V included the Social Democrats' fellow travelers and swing voters. These were the voters whose allegiance the "parties of order" had lost in the Reichstag elections of 1903 and largely won back in 1907. Yet less "reliable" workers and domestic servants outnumbered them by a wide margin. In Categories VI/31 and VI/32 we see that between 85 and

92 percent of those in this group with annual incomes less than 2,200 Marks were expected to vote Social Democratic, depending on whether they had reached the age of forty-five. Eligible electors in these two categories numbered over 313,000, that is, almost half of Saxons who would be enfranchised under the plural suffrage.

Members of the Suffrage Committee and other deputies belonging to the "parties of order" stressed the need to privilege members of the *Mittelstand* with a new suffrage scheme. The difficulty lay in defining why the lower-middle classes deserved electoral preferment. As always, the criterion of "independence," which the National Liberals favored more than the government did, lay in the eye of the beholder. The Saxon *Mittelstand* Union claimed about 57,000 members. Its spokesmen worked assiduously to maintain the fiction that the *Mittelstand* was the state's most reliable bulwark against the socialist threat. Hohenthal more than once expressed his gratitude for the flood of petitions sent to the Landtag and the ministry of the interior by the two antisemites who headed this Union: Theodor Fritsch as its chairman and Ludwig Fahrenbach as its general secretary.<sup>123</sup> It was clear to insiders that their petition campaign was carefully orchestrated and to some extent falsified.<sup>124</sup> Rather than denying such charges, Mehnert's associate Gottfried Opitz challenged the Left to match the lobbying success of these *Mittelständler*. We cannot be certain to what extent Fritsch and Fahrenbach acted independently of the government or the Conservatives. Their close association with Mehnert over many years is suggestive, as is their energy in bombarding the government and the Landtag with written appeals.<sup>125</sup> Hohenthal conceded privately that the government had supported the *Mittelstand* movement "with all permissible means at its disposal." One observer wrote that Hohenthal had been "particularly flirtatious" with the Union, in the hope that it would play a "mediating role" between National Liberals and Conservatives.<sup>126</sup> He did so to put pressure on both the Conservative and National Liberal parties, without much success.

National Liberals did not want to grant extra ballots to all *Mittelständler*. Draft legislation stated that members of the *Mittelstand* would be defined by their eligibility to vote for local boards of industry or agriculture. Even considering the first group alone, this was a significant bloc of electors. In 1907, 79,192 artisans and 80,964 non-artisans were eligible to vote for boards of industry in Saxony.<sup>127</sup> The minority report from the National Liberals on the Suffrage Committee stated that such broad eligibility did not offer any "guarantee for advanced political insight or patriotic ideals." Probably because they knew they had already lost the allegiance of small shopkeepers and artisans to the antisemites and the Conservatives, the

<sup>123</sup> See ch. 10. For correspondence with the Saxon *Mittelstand* Union, SHStAD, Mdl 5498. For the "Verzeichnis von Petitionen zur Wahlrechtsvorlage" from the SMVgg, SHStAD, Ständeversammlung 13188/2. Also Montgelaß, 7.3.07 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 965.

<sup>124</sup> *LT Mitt* 1908/09, II.K., 5:4120 (30.11.08).

<sup>125</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 5467. At a special Saxon *Mittelstandstag* in Dresden on 10.2.08, Fritsch helped engineer a resolution in favor of PR, plural voting, and indirect voting through communal bodies; *DJ*, 11.2.08.

<sup>126</sup> Acting Prussian envoy Heyl to Pr. FO, 22.8.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>127</sup> 21,029 were eligible to vote for *Handelskammern*. *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 37 (1909): 104.



National Liberals declared openly that they wanted to see an extra ballot awarded only to men who already enjoyed affluence, security, and social standing.<sup>128</sup> Paradoxically, the National Liberals also wanted to privilege members of the *Mittelstand* who were *most* susceptible to the influence of their employers.

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Hohenthal's suffrage experts never commented on the larger ramifications of the anti-democratic project they were pursuing. They never offered an opinion about why particular types of *Mittelständler* would support Social Democracy or what would turn them away from such "wrong-headed" thinking. Nor did they ask these questions about "reliable" workers who had refused to join the SPD-led Free Trade Unions.<sup>129</sup> These suffrage experts had good reasons to ensure that patriotic *Mittelständler* and patriotic workers would not feel offended by a new Landtag suffrage, because their votes were desperately needed in Reichstag elections. Yet these men never allowed themselves editorial license to voice such opinions. Instead they focused single-mindedly on the goal of allowing only fifteen Social Democrats into a reformed Landtag.<sup>130</sup> They acknowledged that over half of Saxon voters would support a pariah party whose leaders claimed to seek the "overthrow of the existing state and society." Yet their response to Saxony's political crisis was inscrutable. They did not advocate more repression of Social Democracy, but neither did they counsel constitutional or legal toleration of the kind we normally associate with democracy. They never accepted the notion that workers had a right to be represented equitably in the Landtag. Their task, as they saw it, was to provide the arithmetic that ensured the continued dominance of the "state supporting" parties in Saxony's parliament.

We now know how electoral data were assembled and analyzed to keep democracy at bay. We have discovered how precisely state authorities were able to gauge the penetration of Social Democratic sympathies into (and between) the layers of Saxon society. We cannot say what might have ensued if those calculations had become available to the Saxon public before suffrage reform was finally enacted. As the British envoy reported in December 1908, "C[ount] Hohenthal's original bill . . . was designed to admit a limited number of Socialist members (about 15) and at the same time to disguise the manner in which the limit was maintained."<sup>131</sup> Social Democrats blamed the majority parties for a missed opportunity to make the Saxon Landtag significantly more democratic in 1909.<sup>132</sup> But they never knew how

<sup>128</sup> Bericht 550, 10.

<sup>129</sup> From 1908 onward, "national workers' associations" were subsidized by local chapters of the VSI. When a *Nationaler Arbeiterbund für das Königreich Sachsen* was formed in July 1909, its membership was about 10,000. Saul, *Staat*, 133, 170.

<sup>130</sup> The government's proposals of 31.12.03 and 5.7.07, Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz's speech in July 1907, and Prof. Wach's three-class suffrage proposal of Jan. 1909 all specified the presence of fifteen to twenty SPD deputies in the Landtag as tolerable. Cf. Oppe, "Reform," 394; *SParl*, 70f.; Braun, 3.2.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>131</sup> Findlay, 8.12.08 (draft), PRO, FO 215/55.

<sup>132</sup> *NZ* 27 (1909), 1:681–3 (5.2.09). On Saxon public opinion, see clippings in BAP, RLB-PA 950–2.

assiduously Hohenthal and his suffrage experts had labored to ensure that such a parliament lay beyond their reach. If they *had* known, the “life-giving lie” of the German authoritarian state—the fiction that it was non-partisan—might have suffered a devastating blow.<sup>133</sup> That blow might have been delivered not in Berlin in November 1918 but in Dresden ten years earlier.

#### REFORM AND RETRENCHMENT

The final suffrage legislation of January 1909 required an extraordinary joint session of the Saxon Landtag’s upper and lower houses. Conservatives and National Liberals compromised on a plural voting system that awarded up to four ballots to certain voters.<sup>134</sup> A half-decade of struggle had done away with Saxony’s hated three-class suffrage (which in 1909 was still referred to as “Mehnert’s Law”). At a stroke the Landtag suffrage became direct, and it remained general and secret, for all males over the age of twenty-five.

But it was far from equal.

In the final legislation of 5 May 1909, an elector was awarded one, two, or three supplementary ballots, to be added to his basic ballot, if he met certain criteria. Of those criteria, the most important were income and property: they divided electors into four categories. The first category was based on gross income: one, two, or three supplementary ballots were awarded to those with annual incomes over 1,600 Marks, 2,200 Marks, and 2,800 Marks, respectively. (In British Sterling the corresponding thresholds were 80, 110, and 140 pounds.)<sup>135</sup> The second category was based on income from professional or business enterprises (the kind of income earned by salaried civil servants, secondary school teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, and others). The thresholds for earning an extra ballot here were lower—for one, two, or three supplementary ballots, annual incomes of 1,400 Marks, 1,900 Marks, and 2,500 Marks sufficed. (Corresponding to 70, 95, and 125 pounds.) The third and fourth categories rewarded ownership of landed property in different ways. Electors engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fruit-growing received one, two, or three extra ballots if they cultivated over two, four, or eight hectares of land. Horticulturalists with market gardens or vineyards received one, two, or three extra ballots if they cultivated over one-half, one, or two hectares. In assessing the impact of these criteria, the electoral advantages previously enjoyed by rural taxpayers (compared to urban ones) were reduced, but they were not eliminated.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> The *Lebenslüge* of the authoritarian state and the *Legende* of its *Überparteilichkeit* were phrases coined by Gustav Radbruch in 1930; see Radbruch, “Parteien,” 1:289; Retallack, *Germany’s Second Reich*, ch. 9.

<sup>134</sup> For a translation of the legislation’s most pertinent stipulations, see Appendix 1 in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. Also Oppe, “Reform,” 391ff. General terms of the final agreement were reported in the press on 9.1.09.

<sup>135</sup> Sterling equivalencies outlined in Br. honorary consul E. C. Trench, 19.1.09, PRO, FO 215/56.

<sup>136</sup> The VSI’s “basic demands” included the “dismantling” (*Abbau*) of such advantages; *Vaterl.*, 5.8.05.

Two final categories defined electors who were awarded just one extra ballot. The first included those who qualified for one-year voluntary military service on the basis of the secondary school leaving certificate. The second included all males who had reached their fiftieth birthday. No elector could be eligible to cast more than four ballots.<sup>137</sup>

For simplicity's sake, the process of casting multiple ballots has been explained thus far as though privileged voters would actually push two, three, or four ballots into a box. Not so. Voters instead inserted a single white ballot into an opaque envelope bearing an official stamp and measuring 12 x 18 centimeters. They would have brought the ballot with them to the polling place, where they would be handed an envelope by a returning officer sitting at a table. That officer would have checked the voting lists (and possibly demanded identification) to see whether the voter in question was entitled to cast one or more "ballots." Everything depended on what color envelope he was entitled to use. A voter privileged enough to cast four "ballots" would be given a blue envelope stamped with the letter "A." Into that blue envelope he would insert his *single* white ballot, on which appeared the name of his preferred candidate. Voters entitled to three "ballots" would be given a green envelope stamped "B," those entitled to two "ballots" a yellow envelope stamped "C." Voters entitled to cast only one ballot would use an appropriately non-descript plain white envelope, stamped with a "D." The voter would then emerge from behind the curtain and hand his envelope to the returning officer.

When the voting was completed and the count started, the differently colored envelopes and the ballot they contained would be sorted into separate piles, so that their weighted totals could be calculated accordingly. Every ballot taken out of a blue envelope (marked "A") would go onto one pile, where it would be counted four times—and so on for ballots removed from those green, yellow, and white envelopes.<sup>138</sup>

It has been said that democracy is messy business. Implementing Saxony's new plural suffrage was messy too. It worried and frustrated Saxon civil servants. Between January 1909 and final publication of the new suffrage law in May, many regional governors expressed concern that the legislation's wording—not to mention its intent—needed be tightened up. What should authorities do if these piles of ballots—intentionally or not—were tipped over or otherwise intermixed "by a breeze, a bump of the table, the brush of a coat-sleeve"? Would returning officers be able to distinguish colors under artificial light: perhaps *dark* blue and *light* green envelopes should be used? Should all the envelopes of one color be opened before moving on to the next color? Maybe more stamps were needed for each phase of the counting process? What if a voter demanded to use an envelope—yellow, say, instead of green—that would give his vote *less* weight than he was entitled to?

<sup>137</sup> "Wahlgesetz für die Zweite Kammer der Stände-Versammlung vom 5. Mai 1909," rpt. in Oppe, "Reform," Appendix G. Full English translation of the law appended to A.C. Grant Duff to Br. FO, 15.2.12, PRO, FO 215/60.

<sup>138</sup> *LT Akten* 1907/08, Ständische Schriften, Nr. 107, §22 (25.1.09), 212f.; "Wahlgesetz . . . 5. Mai 1909," §22.

These questions became tiresome to Georg Heink: as he attended to them one by one, the tone of his replies became more exasperated.<sup>139</sup> The same was true of Würzburger's reflections in 1910 and 1911, after the first test of the new suffrage had been completed. On the one hand, thorough statistical analysis of Landtag elections under plural voting was going to be prohibitively expensive. Publishing costs for the extensive statistical report on the 1909 election in the journal of Saxony's Royal Statistical Office may be worth every penny to historians, but at an estimated 1,200–2,000 Marks it rubbed thrifty Saxon bureaucrats the wrong way. Würzburger proposed that statistics from only select constituencies should be gathered in the future. On the other hand, civil servants who decided how many votes were allocated to an individual were imprecise in stating which criteria they used in awarding a second, third, or fourth ballot. Sometimes the complicated nature of the new suffrage simply left them in the dark, as when the district governor of Leipzig asked his superior: "Does a writer, who is eligible for one-year voluntary service [in the army reserve] and has a business income of 2,000 Marks as well as 3 h[ectares] of agricultural property, have 3 or 4 ballots?" He added that "It is unfathomable why, in cases like these, the extra votes awarded for property ownership or education should be denied to lawyers, doctors, etc."<sup>140</sup> Other district governors flatly refused to seek clarification in such matters because answers would never be found in the electoral or tax records. Still others reported that they didn't care *why* a voter was awarded a certain number of extra ballots, only that they got the number right.<sup>141</sup>

We have already mentioned age, gender, and residency qualifications that had to be met to vote at all. The new suffrage enfranchised all males over the age of twenty-five who paid some form of state tax, who had been Saxon citizens for at least two years, and who had resided for at least six months in his polling district. The passive suffrage—the right to stand for election—was awarded to men at least thirty years old with at least three years Saxon citizenship and residency. For them, lawmakers did away with the previous requirement that they pay at least thirty Marks in state taxes annually. Other changes to Saxony's electoral system were less sweeping. The total number of Landtag constituencies rose to ninety-one. Most of the extra constituencies were awarded to the biggest cities. Dresden and Leipzig now included seven each, Chemnitz four, and Zwickau and Plauen one each. The other urban and rural ridings were left largely intact. It is incorrect to say that the demand of the Association of Saxon Industrialists for a redrawing of Saxon constituencies had been fulfilled.<sup>142</sup> The "other urban" riding of 5: Dippoldiswalde still comprised fifteen towns. And those towns still floated like fifteen islands in a

<sup>139</sup> E.g. KHM Friedrich von Crausharr (Bautzen), 5.3.09; KHM Friedrich Fraustadt (Zwickau), 8.3.09, KHM Anselm Rumpelt (Dresden), 6.3.09, all to MdI, with Heink's marginalia, SHStAD, MdI 5455.

<sup>140</sup> AHM Karl Néale von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Leipzig) to KHMS Leipzig (copy), 26.6.09, SHStAD, MdI 5456.

<sup>141</sup> Würzburger to MdI, 1.3.10, 4.2.11, SHStAD, MdI 5492.

<sup>142</sup> Pohl, "Sachsen," 208f.

sea of rural constituencies around them.<sup>143</sup> They stretched from Lengefeld in the west (near Chemnitz) to Berggießhübel in the east (near Dresden).<sup>144</sup> This distance was almost sixty kilometers as the crow flies. Hence campaigning in all parts of this constituency would be as difficult after suffrage reform as before—that is, if other features of Landtag elections remained as they were.

But they did not. Two other fundamental changes were introduced. The system of renewing one-third of the Landtag every two years was abandoned. No longer would it take six years to achieve a complete turnover of Landtag deputies. At the next election all ninety-one seats would be contested, as they would be every six years thereafter. Thus one of the conservative hallmarks of both the 1868 and 1896 suffrages fell by the wayside. Now a sudden change of political opinion could produce a sweeping transformation of the Landtag. The Conservatives had been loath to abandon the one-third election every two years: that “cautionary measure,” they claimed, had been abandoned too lightly. Parties and their candidates would be obliged to mobilize their supporters—and antagonize their opponents—in every corner of the kingdom at the same time. Bearing this in mind helps us appreciate the significance of the second change. Previously, Landtag election battles in Saxony were decided in favor of the candidate who won a relative majority. Run-off elections were never held: they were not needed. But now, just as in Reichstag elections, the battle for a Landtag seat was won only when a candidate attracted more than 50 percent of the popular vote. If no candidate won an absolute majority on the first ballot, a run-off was held between the two candidates with the most votes.

Conservatives were understandably ambivalent about these innovations: both presented their party with new challenges. In rural areas or in widely-dispersed ridings like 5: Dippoldiswalde, Conservatives had often won Landtag seats with little or no campaigning before 1909—sometimes with a landslide, sometimes with a relative majority based on poor turnout. Things would be different in the future. The wholesale election of a new Landtag, the abandonment of three-class voting, and the novelty of run-off elections—these new features of the 1909 suffrage were sure to politicize and likely to mobilize a greater proportion of eligible voters than ever before. Moreover, retention of the secret ballot would exacerbate these worrying features of politics in a new key. This was recognized by a conservative law clerk, Hugo Hofmann, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the evolution of Saxony’s Landtag suffrage. In 1911, Hofmann concluded that retention of the secret ballot in 1909 had been a mistake. To drive home the point he cited a broadside from 1892 against the Reichstag suffrage. “A party of revolution has gained 100,000 votes under the general, secret suffrage. However, not even half the voters are men of revolution. One of them has been annoyed by the village mayor,

<sup>143</sup> Actually, four seas: the rural LT constituencies of 12: Pirna, 13: Dippoldiswalde, 14: Brand, and 33: Zschopau. See maps showing rural and urban Landtag constituencies in Saxony, 1909, and *Grasers Karte von Sachsen mit Angabe der Landtags- u. Reichstagswahlkreise*, c. 1912, both in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. See also maps in ch. 12.

<sup>144</sup> The fifteen towns are listed in SLTW, 108; thirty-four of forty-eight rural LT WKe remained unchanged in 1909.

the other by the local deputy. To exact their revenge, they vote for the revolutionary. With public voting these people would have conducted themselves otherwise, but with the secret ballot no one does his duty."<sup>145</sup>

Another important lesson from Reichstag campaigns was not forgotten. In 1907, Conservatives and other nationalists had come to see the advantages of offering voters a choice between two or more "state-supporting" candidates on the first ballot. Saxon Conservatives in 1909 acknowledged that splitting the anti-socialist vote on the first ballot could have negative consequences and produce disastrous outcomes. But Landtag elections had generated far less excitement than Reichstag elections, even before the three-class suffrage dampened voter interest. And Conservatives understood better in 1909 than they had in the early 1890s how to mobilize anti-socialist feelings among the electorate. Therefore, they could reasonably hope to channel the enthusiasm of newly politicized voters into run-off victories over the SPD.

In October 1909, Social Democratic candidates captured the allegiance of every second Landtag voter, as we shall see. Did "the people" now enjoy fair representation in parliament? Did suffrage reform bring Saxony significantly closer to democracy? To both questions the answer must be no. The principle of "one man, one vote" had been refuted by the majority parties in the Landtag and the government. A typical voter who supported Social Democracy could have no expectation of seeing his vote weighed equally with that of a typical anti-socialist. City-dwellers and those engaged in industry, business, or trade were still massively under-represented in parliament compared to voters living in the countryside and engaged in agriculture. This was true no matter whether they belonged to the working classes and (likely) cast only one ballot, or whether they belonged to the affluent classes and (likely) cast three or four ballots. The unreformed upper house of the Saxon Landtag still resembled the Prussian Herrenhaus more than the upper houses in southern Germany. Saxony's lower house became only slightly more effective as a sounding-board of public opinion than it had been before. And Saxons gained no greater control over political decision-making than they had enjoyed in the 1870s. Saxony in the early twentieth century, just as it had been forty years earlier, was a political laboratory that incubated strategies to preserve the political status quo. Indeed, some enemies of democracy could glimpse a silver lining in the cloud of suffrage reform. Mehnert's memorandum to Bülow in January 1907, suggesting that *any* Landtag reform was premature, was certainly a jeremiad, but it was not fatalistic. Mehnert's battle to undercut reform helped return Saxony to its pioneering role in 1907–09: he heralded retrenchment as a weapon in the war on democracy. On that score, it is difficult to judge him wrong.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Hofmann, *Entwicklung*, 78, citing G. Pfizer, "Das Reichstagswahlgesetz."

<sup>146</sup> Because Mehnert was elevated to the upper house in 1909, he was relieved of the odium of campaigning for election under the new suffrage. He joined the national Conservative Party's Committee of Five in November 1912.

Taking stock, we should remember that Saxon parliamentarians approached the suffrage issue with mixed motives. They were concerned for their own careers, for their party faction, for Saxon traditions, for the security of the state. Mixed motives ensured that individual deputies, like the party caucuses, had divergent opinions about how their Landtag could be transformed into something that would pass muster as a representative parliament. None of the parties to this compromise was entirely satisfied. Among all participants in this election battle, however, the Saxon government had conceded the most.<sup>147</sup> Its proposals of 1903 and 1907 had been swept aside by the National Liberal and Conservative parties, whose members were determined to steer their own course.<sup>148</sup>

When those parties interred Saxony's notorious three-class suffrage, they proclaimed loudly that even the lowliest citizen, once he reached the age of fifty and qualified for a second ballot, would have at least half the electoral influence of the most privileged member of society. This was mere cant. Such claims were recognized as cynical, even mendacious, by those who had been so egregiously marginalized—Social Democrats and Hohenthal himself. The socialists declared that giving a second ballot to anyone over fifty was a “perfidious trick” against working-class Saxons, who had lower life expectancies than their betters.<sup>149</sup> Hohenthal realized that Conservatives were still top of the heap. As he wrote to the king, the compromise bill that eventually became law “undoubtedly fits the views of the agrarians and the *Mittelstand* like a key in a keyhole. But it does not satisfy industry.”<sup>150</sup> Hohenthal showed little sympathy for the economic interests of the working classes and none for the political demands of Social Democracy. His professionalism, his pride, his (limited) sense of fair-play—these had all been offended by “state-supporting” Landtag deputies who had directly opposed his legislative agenda. From Social Democrats he had expected nothing more than outright opposition. But the successful resistance of the Landtag majority to his proposals surprised Hohenthal and embittered him for his remaining few months of life. Should we be surprised too? Arguably not, given the consistency and vehemence with which almost all non-socialist politicians had opposed democracy since the 1860s. Even if we seek only to understand—not judge—the motives of these law-makers, two verdicts appear irrefutable.

First, according to democratic criteria, the Saxon suffrage of 1909 still stood far behind the Reichstag suffrage. Moreover, it was a step backward, not forward, when compared to the voting system and tax threshold that had prevailed from 1868 to 1896.<sup>151</sup> If “democracy” could be found in the new election law, it was written in disappearing ink. Second, Saxony's suffrage reform crisis perpetuated habits of

<sup>147</sup> Hohenlohe, 23.1.09, and acting Pr. envoy Heyl, 22.8.09, both in PAAAB, Sachsen Nr. 60, Bd. 8 (also for following details).

<sup>148</sup> As foreseen in Montgelas, 27.10.05, 29.11.05 (drafts), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 963.

<sup>149</sup> LVZ, 11.1.09, cited in LWRK, 228, and for some of the following points. Heink and Würzburger did their best to prove socialists wrong on this score.

<sup>150</sup> Hohenthal to Friedrich August III, 2.11.08, SHStAD, Mdl 5455.

<sup>151</sup> This is a close paraphrase of Ritter's conclusion in “Wahlen und Wahlpolitik,” 83; cf. Pohl, “Sachsen,” 207.

mind that were doctrinaire and increasingly out of touch with reality. Those habits were evident in the rote phrases Germans used to describe election battles, the war on subversion, and the need to annihilate the “red spectre” once and for all.

Such responses to democracy and the *rotes Gespenst*—the unthinking division of the electorate into only two groups—were the kinds of responses denounced by Hannah Arendt as “thoughtlessness.” In an essay written some fifteen years after *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt addressed the danger of surrendering to the kinds of routines and recitations that are important for carrying out mechanical actions or performances but are inimical to proper understanding. “Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct,” she wrote, “have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality; that is, against the claim on our thinking attention which all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. If we were responsive to this claim all the time, we would soon be exhausted.”<sup>152</sup> The “parties of order” won the thanks of Saxon burghers by successfully ending a suffrage crisis that had lasted six years. But these political players mustered the stamina to finish the job only by invoking standardized codes of expression to guide them on their anti-socialist course. If they had allowed the reality of Social Democracy’s popularity to sink in—if they had allowed the clamor for political equity to claim their “thinking attention”—they would have grown weary before the task of creating another barrier to democracy was completed.

<sup>152</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Thinking, I–III,” *The New Yorker* (21/28 Nov., 5 December 1977), here I, 65.



# 12

## Politics in a New Key

In October-November 1909, the plural suffrage for Saxon Landtag elections was tested for the first time—the *only* time before Germany's Second Reich imploded nine years later. How did the new suffrage affect campaign strategies? Did the election result justify the personal sacrifice offered up by government leader Hohenthal, who died barely three weeks before the election? Were the twin paths of democratization—its social and its political aspects—diverging more rapidly now than before?

Only time would tell. Observers of all political hues tried to take stock of what went so wrong—or so right. One question seemed more urgent than all the others, because it reflected uncertainty about the prospects of constitutional reform beyond Saxon borders: Had the plural suffrage saved the existing social and political order, or was it a grave miscalculation?

### *PRAXIS, OCTOBER 1909*

The Vitzthum family are noted for lack of brains.

—Eyre Crowe, British Foreign Office<sup>1</sup>

I had the historian's love for the discovery of sources in unexpected places, and the historian's confidence that the apparent drudgery with little return would bring accuracy in its particularity.

—Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches*<sup>2</sup>

The chancellor who led Germany into the First World War was proud of the way German students responded when “war” was initially declared. “What a great event of world history has unfolded before our eyes during the past few days!” he wrote to his dearest friend. The “simpering, petty spirit among us,” he hoped, would soon yield to “a unanimous wave of patriotic enthusiasm and dedication to a great

<sup>1</sup> As the son of British Consul Joseph Archer Crowe, Eyre Crowe had spent his boyhood in Leipzig. In 1907 he produced an unsolicited “Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany” for the British FO, according to which Germany sought hegemony first in Europe and eventually in the world. This citation is from Crowe's minute (19.4.09) on British envoy to Saxony, Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay, to Br. FO, 14.4.09. BFO-CP, FO 371/672, reel 24, no. 7079.

<sup>2</sup> Dening, *Islands and Beaches* (Melbourne, 1980), 4.

cause.” Despite sadness and revulsion at what had caused this “complete regeneration” of the German spirit, and worried about the “Israelitic cosmopolitan tendency” that might undermine the unity of *Volk* and state, he concluded that these “magnificent days” had “defeated all cowardice!” With these words he ended his emotional confession before—characteristically—he wrote again the next day to express regret for having given in to flights of fancy.

One might imagine that Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg’s outburst occurred in the first week of August 1914. But Bethmann wrote these lines at a much younger age, after the second assassination attempt against Kaiser Wilhelm I in June 1878. The “indifference” and “frivolity” to which this university student referred were not a comment on Europe’s *belle époque* before 1914. Rather, they characterized what Bethmann believed to be public apathy toward Social Democracy—apathy that had grown in the 1860s and 1870s even as the SPD found a foothold in German electoral culture. In the coming conflict, which soon took tangible form in Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law, Bethmann foresaw “a milestone for our inner development,” on which the “despicable socialists” and “doctrinaire liberals” would all “smash their heads.”<sup>3</sup>

The vehemence of young Bethmann’s outburst in 1878 offers a starting point to examine the Saxon Landtag election campaign of 1909. Social Democracy in that year was well-positioned to go on the offensive.<sup>4</sup> The SPD did not choose the political terrain on which the conflict would be waged, just as it had not manufactured the preconditions for its triumph of June 1903. Yet in 1909, Saxony’s “parties of order” were hamstrung by fragile alliances and inflexible tactics. Dissatisfaction with the economic, social, and political status quo was manifest among Germany’s working classes and the SPD’s fellow travelers. That dissatisfaction gave Social Democrats the high ground when battle was joined.

## PORTENTS

Between passage of Saxony’s new suffrage in January 1909 and its first test the following October, contemporary observers tried to assess how far Saxon Social Democracy’s organizational strength and self-confidence had rebounded since January 1907. The SPD was a different party than it had been just a few years earlier, regionally and nationally. The Austrian envoy’s assessment was typical: German political life had experienced a seismic shift in the past two years. When the Saxon SPD convened a special congress in Zittau in August 1909, it proclaimed the situation “more favorable than ever before.” The party announced that its election agitation would connect Saxon and Reich politics “as closely together as possible.” As one speaker put it, “the Social Democrats would be downright fools if

<sup>3</sup> Bethmann to Wolfgang von Oettingen, 13.6.78, in Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 27; Vietsch, *Bethmann*, 41–3, 320–1.

<sup>4</sup> See SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Leipzig . . . 1910*.

they didn't do everything in their power to exploit the existing dissatisfaction in the land due to the monstrous rise of food prices and the new taxes."<sup>5</sup>

For agitational purposes, Social Democrats intended to lump all the non-socialist parties into what Hermann Fleißner called a "compact reactionary mass." The National Liberals were both villains and victims. "Defeated and at the same time bearing the greatest blame, the National Liberals, with their proposals for plural voting, . . . dug a grave for the Saxon people, [but] they were pitched into it themselves by the Conservatives." Even the left-liberal Radical People's Party, whose leaders "pretended to be the people's tribunes," did not escape Fleißner's attack. To general agreement he declared that Saxon left liberals only "distinguish themselves from the other reactionaries in that their hypocrisy is greater. (Very good!)"<sup>6</sup> Fleißner also charged that government leader Hohenthal and his "cronies" had created yet another "unfree suffrage." "Computations upon computations were called for," declared Fleißner; "civil servants had to wrack their brains and work their fingers to the bone, they had to let numbers upon numbers march forward, to create the documentary foundation for a suffrage that met the demand of the majority parties."<sup>7</sup>

Saxon Social Democrats were confident heading into the Landtag election campaign of 1909. Popular dissatisfaction with the plural suffrage was not only due to their own efforts at organization and agitation, but also because the political constellation in Germany had changed. It did so during the same period (early 1907 to mid-1909) that Saxons suffered their own reform agonies. The continuity of party alignments in Germany was ruptured by the demise of the Bülow Bloc in July 1909. That rupture was barely on the horizon in January of that year, when the Saxon reform was completed. By October 1909, however, the endless calculations that had forecast the entry of fifteen Social Democrats into the Landtag were less than useless.

The Bülow Bloc was brought down by the refusal of the Conservative and Center parties to approve the Finance Reform that the chancellor had made the central feature of his political program.<sup>8</sup> The Finance Reform crisis of 1908–09 produced the 500 million Marks in new revenues that massive expenditures on an Imperial navy required to balance the books. Bülow and the liberal parties in his Bloc advocated a reform that raised 400 million Marks in the form of indirect taxes on such popular consumer items as cigarettes and beer and only a small portion on direct taxes. Conservative agrarians in Prussia refused to support a modest direct tax on inherited wealth. Widows and orphans, they claimed, would become the targets of the state when they were most vulnerable. Between late 1908 and June 1909, Catholic Centrists and Conservatives joined forces, exploded the Bloc, and

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Austrian envoy to Saxony, Karl zu Fürstenberg, to Austrian FO, 28.8.09, HHSStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>6</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Zittau . . . 1909*, 17, 78–9.

<sup>7</sup> "Zahlen auf Zahlen anmarschieren lassen . . ." Ibid., 74–5. Note use of "demand" in the singular.

<sup>8</sup> Witt, *Finanzpolitik*; Vogel, "Konservativen und Blockpolitik"; Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*, 261–9; Bohlmann, "Deutschkonservative Partei," ch. 5; Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, chs. 6–7; Lerman, *Chancellor*, ch. 6; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, vol. 3, chs. 19–27.

produced Imperial Germany's most dramatic cliff-hanger (at least in domestic politics). Bülow and his chancellery chief Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell continued to hope until the final defeat of their bill on 24 June 1909 that "a meteor [would] fall from the sky."<sup>9</sup> But the Agrarian League was the tail that wagged the Conservative dog. Kaiser Wilhelm II insisted that Bülow remain in office long enough to oversee passage of the Conservative-Center bill, without an inheritance tax. On 14 July 1909, Bethmann Hollweg succeeded him as Reich chancellor.

The collapse of the Bülow Bloc affected the prospects for democracy and the war on "subversion" in myriad ways. Wilhelm refused to acknowledge that Germany's semi-parliamentary monarchy was evolving. The Reichstag majority that opposed a bill supported by the full authority of the state had seized a measure of constitutional power for itself, no matter what Wilhelm thought or did. As Bethmann observed in a letter to Bülow, Conservative intransigence "accelerates our development down the path of democracy instead of holding it in check."<sup>10</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* Affair and the Eulenburg scandals in 1908–09 not only drove a wedge between emperor and chancellor (Wilhelm considered Bülow's defense of his indiscretion to be half-hearted). They also shook public confidence that anyone was fully in charge of either domestic or foreign policy. We saw in Chapter 9 that Bülow, after giving liberals hope that reform of the Prussian three-class suffrage was in the offing, offered platitudes and no action on the issue.

Although the National Liberal leader Ernst Bassermann believed that the "ghastly" taxes voted by the Conservatives and the Center would bring the National Liberals "100,000 new voters," the two-year wait for the next Reichstag election represented a lost opportunity for German liberals. As early as August 1909, Bassermann wrote to a party colleague that "we two will never see a large liberal party and parliamentary government." According to Bassermann's literary executor, by 1911 the National Liberals' supporters had "allow[ed] themselves to be much too impressed by the luster and outward power of the Kaiserreich for them to feel moved to any kind of intensive political exertion."<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Bethmann Hollweg struggled to maintain the confidence of his master, and perhaps win the Conservatives to his side, by repeating his pledge of no-compromise with Social Democracy. A similar strategy had been pursued within the Bülow Bloc by the left-liberal and National Liberal parties, and it continued after 1909. They turned to chauvinistic imperialism to paper over divisions in their own camps and to burnish their credentials as "state-supporting" parties.

Public opinion in the summer of 1909 was more vehemently anti-Conservative and anti-agrarian than at any other time in the imperial era. The Conservatives faced outraged opponents in the Reichstag, in state parliaments, and in the press, not only for their arrogance but for hard economic times in general. A downturn in the German economy had set in during the summer of 1907. After a brief uptick in late 1909—too late to assuage workers' discontent during the Saxon Landtag

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Bassermann's remark of 18.5.09 cited in Eschenburg, *Kaiserreich*, 224.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of 14.7.11, cited in Gutsche, *Aufstieg*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Eschenburg, *Kaiserreich*, 261–7.

campaign—the economic doldrums continued.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, indirect taxes on everyday consumer goods, together with import tariffs on grains, sent food prices higher, giving Social Democrats more weapons to fight the class warfare they claimed Conservatives had unleashed on them.

Bülow's parting shots about Conservative Party arrogance were on target. The Conservatives' opposition to his inheritance tax, he wrote, would leave a legacy of "confusion, bitterness, [and] depression among wide circles of Conservatives, especially in middle Germany, in the cities, among civil servants, lower-middle classes, etc." Bülow also foresaw "real (not imaginary) concessions to the liberal-democratic idea in Prussia."<sup>13</sup> On another occasion Bülow told a sympathetic Conservative that his party's opposition to finance reform would lead to a "sharpening of conflicts between Conservatives and liberals, . . . above all a re-strengthening of radicalism."<sup>14</sup> Like Cassandra, Bülow hoped his prophesies would not come true, but his parting words to the Conservatives were unambiguous: "We will see each other at Philippi."<sup>15</sup>

The Bülow Bloc collapsed in a way that linked Saxon and Reich politics. In the spring of 1909, Bülow and Loebell had courted Paul Mehnert, Dresden Mayor Otto Beutler, and other Conservatives for their support.<sup>16</sup> Saxon Conservatives declared with public fanfare that they would support an inheritance tax in this hour of need.<sup>17</sup> Not for the first or last time, Mehnert was playing a double game. Saxon Conservatives hoped to win political favor in industrial circles and among *Mittelstand* voters by offering to compromise on the inheritance tax issue. That they disagreed with their Prussian colleagues to the north played to Saxon particularism. In the process, Mehnert ran the risk of exhausting the patience of Ernst von Heydebrand, *de facto* head of the national party, and the Agrarian League. The Conservative Party was flexible enough for Mehnert to play this game for a time. He was not about to sacrifice agrarian interests: the Agrarian League's help at election time had become indispensable. But too much of a good thing—the agrarians' hyperbolic rhetoric—was awkward at this juncture.

In July 1909, Mehnert's charade fell apart. On 10 July, the Austrian envoy in Dresden reported a conversation he had just had with Saxony's new government leader, Count Christoph Vitzthum von Eckstädt.<sup>18</sup> Both men agreed "that the pro-inheritance tax stance of the Saxon agrarians and Conservatives represents nothing

<sup>12</sup> Hentschel, *Wirtschaft*, 238–52; on real wages, Orsagh, "Löhne," 479–81, and Gömmel, *Realeinkommen*, 25–9.

<sup>13</sup> Bülow's marginalia (8.4.09) cited in Witt, *Finanzpolitik*, 275. Cf. Bülow, *SBDR*, 237:8585–9 (16.6.09).

<sup>14</sup> Bülow to Axel von Kaphengst and Bülow to Loebell, both 31.3.11, BAK, NL Loebell, Nr. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten* 2:520–1. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, act IV, scene 3, the ghost of Julius Caesar tells Brutus that they will meet at (the Battle of) Philippi.

<sup>16</sup> BAK, Rkz 211. Further references in Retallack, "Conservatives *contra* Chancellor," 224–32; Retallack, "Road to Philippi," 261–71; Retallack, *German Right*, 353–60. If Mehnert's objections to Heydebrand and the BdL were genuine, it seems unlikely his portrait would have appeared as the frontispiece to the *Konservativer Kalender* in 1916.

<sup>17</sup> *Vaterl.*, 15.4.09, 4.5.09, 1.8.09; cf. press duel in *NLVBl.*, 1.8.09, *Vaterl.*, 1.9.09, 1.10.09.

<sup>18</sup> Fürstenberg, 10.7.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

more than a carefully-calculated electoral maneuver to fish for votes in the approaching Landtag elections.”

Until now, the entire press has been heaping unbridled praise on this stance of the Saxon Conservatives, and only the most mischievous newspapers refused to ascribe any significance to this Saxon peculiarity. Lately, however, voices from the agrarian camp in Saxony have been multiplying in Conservative newspapers: in the most indiscreet and incautious manner they are expressing thanks to their colleagues in Prussia for their manly stance in defense of common interests. Understandably, the liberal and socialist newspapers are making full use of this inopportune triumphal screech in order to “rip the mask from the face” of the Conservatives.

As Otto Beutler noted when reporting on the Landtag campaign in Dresden, the timing of the Finance Reform debacle could not have been worse. The effect of “many new taxes” would be felt in the next few weeks. Together with the disintegration of the Bülow Bloc and the liberals’ “duplicitous” claims that they had fought against those taxes, a “considerable” number of working-class voters could be expected to abandon the Conservative Party in Saxony.<sup>19</sup> Beutler advised Vitzthum “as urgently as possible” to enlighten voters about Saxon Conservatives’ position on taxes. In effect he wanted the Saxon government, not his own party, to be the target of ordinary Saxons’ outrage. Otherwise “many voters would repair to the camp of the enemies of the state or at least avow their allegiance to the extreme Left.”

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In 1909, Saxon Social Democrats demonstrated growing confidence that, in a democratizing age, time was on their side. Their enemies dreaded they were right.

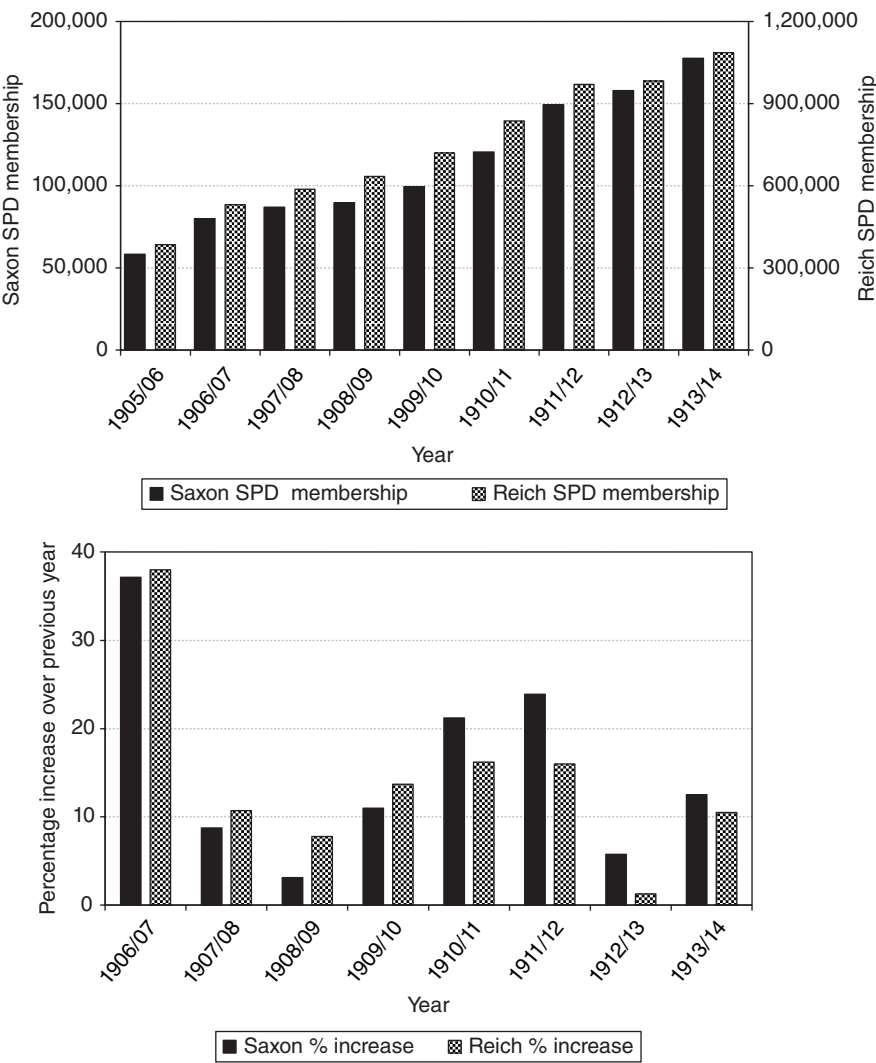
Although suffrage battles since 1903 had mobilized tens of thousands of new recruits for the SPD (not including fellow travelers), economic growth was uneven enough in the years 1905–14 to constrain the SPD’s expansion. Straightened family budgets in certain years more than compensated for the excitement generated by suffrage reform debates. In the twelve months between the summers of 1908 and 1909, when Saxony’s suffrage reform debate reached its height, party membership hardly grew at all. By contrast, Hamburg was convulsed after 1904 by suffrage reform agitation, and its party membership jumped from about 18,000 in 1904 to over 32,000 in 1907.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 12.1 documents the growing membership of the Social Democratic Party in Saxony and the Reich. The top half reflects the common notion that SPD growth was unrelenting. The bottom half reveals slower expansion during hard times. Long-term growth is the more important trend. Total SPD membership in Saxony tripled between 1905 and 1914. The Saxon SPD’s share of the national party membership increased too—from 11 percent in 1905/06 to over 16 percent in mid-1914.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Beutler to Mdi, 30.7.09, SHStAD, Mdi 5351.

<sup>20</sup> Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:307–13, including 309 on Berlin in 1910.

<sup>21</sup> 58,305 members (Saxony) and 384,327 (Reich), 1905/06; 177,655 (Saxony) and 1,085,905 (Reich), 1913/14.



**Figure 12.1.** SPD Membership Growth, Saxony and the Reich, 1905–14. Figures correspond to the end of the reporting year, normally 30 June or 1 July. Some percentages calculated by the author.

*Source:* Drawn from data in SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll...Leipzig...1914*, 11 (Saxony); Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:308 (Reich).

Table 12.1 shows the mobilizing effect of Imperial Germany’s last general election campaign: total SPD membership in Saxony jumped by 50 percent in only two years (from mid-1910 to mid-1912).<sup>22</sup> It also shows large disparities

<sup>22</sup> See the highlighted figures on the bottom line of this table.

**Table 12.1.** Saxon SPD Membership, by Reichstag Constituency, 1901–14

No.	Constituency	Party Membership												
		1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906/07	1907/08	1908/09	1909/10	1910/11	1911/12	1912/13	1913/14
1	Zittau	541	733	871	878	1,016	1,166	1,058	1,057	1,151	1,320	1,877	1,949	2,364
2	Löbau	600	613	713	716	785	987	890	879	1,140	1,612	2,060	2,238	2,496
3	Bautzen	264	305	344	426	480	605	702	857	1,028	1,216	1,375	1,549	1,780
4	Dresden-New City	1,405	2,133	2,802	4,024	4,902	6,636	7,494	8,059	9,258	10,957	13,061	13,487	14,226
5	Dresden-Old City	1,230	1,620	1,900	2,162	1,942	3,087	3,153	3,032	3,494	4,696	5,810	5,961	6,331
6	Dresden County	1,837	2,188	3,434	4,927	6,001	9,742	10,400	10,832	13,090	15,552	18,606	19,981	21,663
7	Meißen	751	898	1,400	1,526	2,027	3,655	3,701	3,471	4,143	5,128	6,413	6,539	7,361
8	Pirna	910	775	1,209	1,152	1,482	2,491	2,940	3,119	3,359	4,256	5,356	5,882	6,301
9	Freiberg	224	210	265	327	492	949	820	722	835	1,043	1,327	1,688	2,146
10	Döbeln	824	1,169	1,500	1,300	1,380	1,700	2,000	2,000	1,995	2,300	3,393	3,498	3,918
11	Oschatz-Grimma	233	279	427	715	946	1,190	1,159	1,227	1,623	2,235	2,540	2,530	2,796
12	Leipzig-City	742	1,300	1,630	1,681	2,100	3,300	3,375	3,461	3,572	4,263	4,212	4,352	5,032
13	Leipzig-County	4,890	5,557	7,000	11,743	12,541	20,710	23,702	23,728	24,945	28,690	32,219	33,941	40,017
14	Borna	539	900	1,000	1,000	1,200	1,559	1,471	1,326	1,302	1,823	2,200	2,500	2,507
15	Mittweida	1,139	1,486	2,077	2,108	2,162	2,837	3,042	3,335	3,381	3,798	4,580	4,779	5,556
16	Chemnitz	1,580	2,000	3,000	3,970	4,786	5,652	6,564	7,465	7,850	9,054	14,381	16,408	20,361
17	Glauchau-Meerane	1,068	942	1,750	1,490	1,600	2,570	2,800	2,946	2,661	3,064	3,686	3,792	4,149
18	Zwickau	2,460	2,022	2,277	2,210	2,209	2,633	2,933	3,295	4,040	5,450	6,524	6,658	7,453
19	Stollberg	1,351	1,430	1,437	1,680	1,735	2,691	2,876	3,087	3,292	3,651	4,316	4,176	5,394
20	Marienberg	328	348	438	638	614	852	1,012	1,096	1,392	1,489	1,940	2,017	2,379
21	Annaberg	300	350	450	400	450	1,161	1,251	1,201	1,637	1,983	2,517	2,376	2,663
22	Auerbach	1,266	1,543	1,744	1,737	1,644	1,855	1,906	1,746	1,953	2,900	4,091	4,247	4,866
23	Plauen	1,099	1,117	1,196	1,370	1,550	1,930	1,671	1,701	2,331	4,104	6,841	7,365	5,896
Total		25,581	29,918	38,864	48,180	54,044	79,958	86,920	89,642	99,472	120,584	149,325	157,913	177,655

Source: SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Zittau . . . 1909*, 29; Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 63.



**Table 12.2.** The SPD Press in Saxony and the Reich, Circulation, 1890s–1914

Year	Saxony	Reich
1890s	50,000 (1896)	254,100 (1890)
1899	72,320	400,000
1904	121,750	600,000
1905	134,400	
1906	142,000	837,790
1907	176,500	
1908	161,370 170,000	
1909	159,640 169,000	1,041,488
1910	170,201	1,160,016
1911	183,781	1,306,465
1912	214,884	1,478,042
1913	219,364	1,465,212
1914	215,428	1,488,345
1915		1,060,891
1916		900,731
1917	c. 240,000	762,757

*Notes:* Figures represent total circulation. Higher figure for Saxony 1908 is from Förstenberg, "Übersicht . . . 1909." Divergent figures for Saxony 1909 are from SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Zwickau . . . 1909*, 10, 31.

*Sources:* SPD Sachsens, *Protokolle*, 1909–14; Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 85; Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:540, 543; Schröder, "Brücke"; Winkler, "Statistik," 171; Förstenberg, "Übersicht . . . 1909 / 1912," SHStAD, KHMSL, 250, 254.

between the size and between the growth rates of SPD organizations in Saxony's twenty-three Reichstag constituencies. In early 1907, only one constituency organization (13: Leipzig-County) boasted more than 10,000 members. By mid-1914, three more constituencies had been added.<sup>23</sup> Over 50 percent of all party members in Saxony belonged to one of these four constituency organizations. Leipzig-County alone had swollen to 40,000 members.

The growth of the Social Democratic press illustrates some of the same features as rising party membership.<sup>24</sup> Whereas SPD readership in Saxony was estimated at about 50,000 in 1896, it was three times larger by 1904. The years 1908–10 showed only modest gains, but the two winter Reichstag campaigns of 1906/07 and 1911/12 appear to have boosted readership again. After the first of these, Social Democrats had three local organs in Saxony with over 30,000 subscribers.<sup>25</sup> More dramatic expansion coincided with the Reichstag elections of January 1912, largely

<sup>23</sup> These were the constituency organizations in 4: Dresden-New City, 6: Dresden-County, and 16: Chemnitz. Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:329–31, provides an occupational breakdown of Free Trade Union members in 13: Leipzig-County (1908–12), divided by gender.

<sup>24</sup> See sources for Table 12.2.

<sup>25</sup> See the figure on principal Social Democratic newspapers in Saxony and their subscriptions (1897–1917) in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. The war reduced the party's newspaper subscriptions everywhere. In 1917, Saxony's two leading organs, in Leipzig and Chemnitz, still had about 50,000 subscribers.

because the SPD campaigned without interruption through 1911. The Saxon SPD's share of the party's national readership shrank from about 20 percent around the turn of the century to about 14 percent in 1914.<sup>26</sup>

For Social Democratic newspapers, party members' subscriptions were essential, and like membership dues, they had to be abandoned when there was no other way to put food on working-class tables. Newspapers such as Max Riedel's *Volksstimme* in Chemnitz, with a circulation of about 43,000 in 1907, were distributed almost exclusively by individual *colporteur*, who received lists of subscribers from the publisher and then distributed newspapers by hand. Thus SPD functionaries at the grass-roots level often established a personal relationship with individual readers (or, if they were adult males, with individual voters).<sup>27</sup> Riedel noted that acceptance of a *colportage*—which anti-socialists defamed as “peddling”—included “the obligation . . . to win new subscribers in the district assigned to him.” Saxon authorities railed against SPD functionaries who “foisted” their newspapers on tavern owners and other small businessmen. Max Bartsch, who headed the political police division in Dresden from 1904 to 1912, noted that business people in and around Dresden “have to contribute money to the [SPD] party coffers . . . [and] they have to subscribe to the workers' press (this is monitored from time to time).” Referring to pub owners who hoped to satisfy thirsty workers and stay afloat financially, Bartsch wrote that “they must insert an advertisement with their New Year's greeting (otherwise their doorbell is rung at night and they are asked why they neglected to do so).”<sup>28</sup>

The Free Trade Unions, SPD cultural movements, and consumer cooperatives contributed to the mobilization of voters in Saxony and the Reich.<sup>29</sup> Two other factors must be highlighted as conducive to Social Democratic success in 1909 and 1912. Even though female suffrage would have to wait until 1918, reform of Germany's Association Law in 1908 permitted women and minors to join political parties. The Conservatives tried hesitantly to address women during the Landtag campaign of 1909: “Who has made coffee, tea, and matches more expensive for the German housewife?” they asked; “Not the Conservatives . . . but rather the Liberals.”<sup>30</sup> Yet Conservatives did not expend significant effort to mobilize women for another three years. In the meantime the Saxon SPD gained ground. In the poorest Saxon constituencies, the party charged women only five Pfennigs in membership dues—half that paid by men.<sup>31</sup> Table 12.3 shows the growth of female party membership in the years before 1914. The proportion of women in the Saxon and national parties never differed by more than 2 percent. In 1914 they both stood at 16 percent—double the proportion of women in the Free Trade Unions.

<sup>26</sup> Dieter Fricke calculated the relationship between the number of votes cast for SPD candidates and the number of subscribers to the party's press for the RT elections of 1907 and 1912. For 1907 he found that readers of the *LVZ* in Saxony's 12th and 13th RT WKe were about twice as likely to vote SPD as readers of *Vw* in Berlin or the *Volksstimme* in Braunschweig. Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:545–6.

<sup>27</sup> For the following, Schröder, “Brücke,” 18.

<sup>28</sup> *Polizeirat* Bartsch, undated notes [1907–11], SHStAD, NL Max Bartsch, F1.

<sup>29</sup> These pillars of the socialist movement lie beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>30</sup> *Vaterl.*, 1.10.09. <sup>31</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Dresden . . . 1912*, 20.

Table 12.3. Male and Female Membership in the SPD, Saxony and the Reich, 1908–14

Year	Saxony				Reich			
	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	Total (no.)	Female (%)	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	Total (no.)	Female (%)
1908	80,512	6,371	86,883	7	557,878	29,458	587,336	5
1909	81,588	8,054	89,642	9	571,050	62,259	633,309	10
1910	90,030	9,442	99,472	9	637,396	82,642	720,038	11
1911	106,820	13,764	120,584	11	728,869	107,693	836,562	13
1912	131,283	18,042	149,325	12	839,741	130,371	970,112	13
1913	136,745	21,168	157,913	13	841,735	141,115	982,850	14
1914	149,131	28,524	177,655	16	911,151	174,754	1,085,905	16

*Note:* Membership in the Reich's SPD-affiliated Free Trade Unions more than doubled in the 1890s and more than tripled between 1900 and 1910, when it stood at 2,017,000 (of whom 151,512 or 8 percent were women).

*Sources:* SPD Sachsens, *Protokolle . . . Zittau . . . 1909*, 29; *ibid.* *Dresden . . . 1912*, 28; *ibid.*, *Plauen . . . 1913*, *ibid.* *Leipzig . . . 1914*, 10; Förstenberg, "Übersichten . . . 1909–12," SHStAD, KHMSL, 250, 254; Fricke, *Handbuch*, 1:439f.; Berghahn, *Kaiserreich*, 337; Berghahn, *Imperial Germany*, 344; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 37 (1909): 286.

Electoral success also depended on the number of political rallies organized in a given constituency, and thus also on the number of pubs, assembly halls, and other venues available to the "enemies of the Reich."<sup>32</sup> If a Social Democrat sat in a municipal assembly or council, that could smooth the way for successful agitation too: sometimes these local politicians stood as SPD candidates themselves. Saxon Social Democrats enjoyed these advantages most conspicuously in the large cities of Leipzig, Dresden, and Chemnitz, though also in their hinterlands. In relatively rural constituencies in the east, west, and northern corners of the kingdom, SPD functionaries lacked such advantages. There they often had little experience in grass-roots organization or saw no point in contesting unwinnable seats.

If we compare the Saxon SPD's campaign activity for the Reichstag elections of 1907 and 1912 as well as the Saxon Landtag election of 1909, we see a remarkable increase in effort and expenditure during these years.<sup>33</sup> Campaign costs varied enormously across Saxony's twenty-three Reichstag constituencies, but the fundamental politicization of German society can be read indirectly from the steady rise in election campaign costs. For the Reichstag election of 1907, the party spent 251,873 Marks in Saxony. For the 1912 election, the party spent 379,756 Marks—an increase of 50 percent in just five years. The data for the SPD's Landtag

<sup>32</sup> For the Reichstag elections of 1907 and 1912 and the Landtag elections of 1909, see the figure on the SPD press, agitation, and election costs in Saxony, by constituency (1907–12), in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>33</sup> This and the next paragraph are based on SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Dresden . . . 1907*; *idem*, *Protokoll . . . Zittau . . . 1909*; *idem*, *Protokoll . . . Leipzig . . . 1910*; *idem*, *Protokoll . . . Dresden . . . 1912*; SPD Agitationskomitee Leipzig, *Bericht . . . für das Jahr 1909–1910* (Leipzig, 1910), 47–51; Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 84–5; Förstenberg "Übersicht . . . 1909," SHStAD, KHMSL 250.

election campaign of 1909 are patchier. But like the better-studied Reichstag contests, this was an expensive affair.

In the four Reichstag constituencies (11–14) constituting the SPD's Leipzig Agitation District, the party spent 28,180 Marks on the 1909 Landtag campaign. (By comparison, the Association of Saxon Industrialists spent 60,000 Marks to assist National Liberal candidates in Leipzig, Dresden, and Chemnitz.)<sup>34</sup> In the same four constituencies in 1907 and 1912, the SPD's Reichstag campaign costs topped 75,000 Marks and 80,000 Marks, respectively. It would be wrong to conclude that the Leipzig SPD organization put one-third as much effort into the 1909 Landtag election as it did for the two Reichstag campaigns that bracketed it. In the summer and autumn of 1909, 317 election rallies were held in this district, compared to 265 in the campaign of 1906/07 and 350 in the longer campaign of 1911/12. In 1909, about 1.2 million flyers were distributed in the Leipzig Agitation District, compared to over 1.5 million in 1906/07 and over 2.2 million in 1911/12. In 1909 those flyers were supplemented by 320,000 leaflets, 13,000 posters, and almost half a million pre-printed ballots.

The intensity and expense of Social Democrats' agitation for the 1909 Landtag campaign increased the feeling among their enemies that this election was indeed a leap in the dark. Every Landtag constituency was contested at the same time—not just one-third of them, as had been the case since 1869. Run-off elections were another worrying novelty, requiring voters in fifty-eight constituencies to head back to the polls a week or two after the first round. Voter turnout rocketed. In the last three elections under the three-class suffrage (1903–05–07), the turnout rate in Saxony averaged just 44 percent. In 1909, it averaged almost 83 percent, and in Leipzig it was higher.<sup>35</sup> This was partly because Social Democrats had outperformed all other parties in agitating *between* election campaigns. In the non-election year from mid-1907 to mid-1908, the Saxon wing of the party distributed 997,000 flyers, 295,000 leaflets, and almost 7,000 posters. In the same period, party membership jumped 11 percent. Membership in 13: Leipzig-County already overshadowed that of three other SPD agitational districts, and its predominance grew. The agitation committee for Leipzig made sure everyone knew who deserved bragging rights.<sup>36</sup>

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The scale, fervor, and relentlessness of Social Democratic agitation worried Saxon authorities. At the height of the Finance Reform crisis in June 1909, Saxony's interior ministry issued a circular to its district and regional governors, instructing them to send regular reports about the election campaign in each constituency.<sup>37</sup> Not many reports flowed all the way up to Dresden—many district governors felt

<sup>34</sup> Pohl, "Nationalliberalen," 203; Pohl, *Stresemann*, 167. The SPD in those four Leipzig constituencies boasted roughly ten times as many members (29,742) as belonged to Leipzig's National Liberal Association (3,016). *NLVBl*, 15.8.09.

<sup>35</sup> RWA, 176, 181; Fö "Übersicht... 1909," SHStAD, KHMSL 250; see this and subsequent reports for some following details.

<sup>36</sup> Agitationskomitee der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Leipzigs, *Bericht... 1907–08*, 4–5.

<sup>37</sup> Mdl Verordnung, 22.9.09 (draft), SHStAD, Mdl 5451.

they had more important things to do. When reports were submitted, they were accompanied by SPD flyers, leaflets, and posters. (Propaganda materials from the “parties of order” were deemed not worth sending.) These reports reflected a consensus among Saxon civil servants that Social Democratic agitation was intolerable—in both tone and substance.<sup>38</sup>

These officials, both in Dresden and on the hustings, were equally sure that the “parties of order” were complacent, unorganized, and disunited. One district governor sounded a familiar complaint: “About the prospects for the candidates of the individual parties, no reliable judgment can be made because of lack of experience with the new suffrage and because no one has begun campaigning in a way that makes the campaign even vaguely clear.” He added that “only the number of voters in the 4 divisions (with 4, 3, 2, and 1 ballots) could perhaps yield some insight in this regard.” The numbers provided no cause for optimism. “Because the voters with 1 and 2 ballots are, in the vast majority, adherents of Social Democracy, [and] because many of the voters with 3 and 4 ballots, who are influenced and upset by affairs in the Reich (Finance Reform etc.), will abstain from voting, the situation for the *Ordnungsparteien* . . . is anything but auspicious.”<sup>39</sup>

Meißen’s district governor concurred. “It will require extraordinary effort to succeed with candidates of the party [*sic* in the singular] of order,” he observed, “because among the broad masses of the people, and also among otherwise sensible burghers, a general dissatisfaction now exists over the introduction of new Reich taxes.” Again, the election outcome seemed likely to turn on the question of how many “reliable” voters would be eligible to cast extra ballots: “By no means only a few workers have a right to multiple ballots: in this district, incomes of 1,600–1,800 Marks are not at all uncommon even among the working-class population, and the number of workers who also have the [extra] age vote is very considerable.” “Regarding the purely rural population,” this governor added, “one also finds a large number of older people of lesser means; so at least one can hope that this side will vote well, if at all.”<sup>40</sup> Worries about rural electors who might not bother to vote were real but not entirely warranted. Whereas overall turnout in Saxony’s forty-eight rural constituencies was 80 percent—five percentage points lower than in large and medium-sized cities—it was higher (85 percent) among rural voters with four ballots to cast than among those (76 percent) with only two.<sup>41</sup>

The 1909 campaign produced little evidence of *direct* intervention by central authorities to produce “good” elections. Handwringing was more common. Nevertheless—and this is the more important point—representatives of the German authoritarian state earnestly hoped for, and in some cases helped manufacture, nationalist victories at the polls. A “strong increase in Social Democratic votes” was something to be “feared.” A double candidature by two non-socialist parties was to

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Heink’s marginalia to a report from KHMS Leipzig, 22.7.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>39</sup> AHMS Dresden-Altsadt to KHMS Dresden, 31.7.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5451.

<sup>40</sup> AHMS Meißen to KHMS Dresden, 3.8.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5451.

<sup>41</sup> Figures rounded from *StatJbS* 38 (1910): 292.

be “regretted.” And the defense of a seat held by a Conservative was to be “supported” and “hoped for.”<sup>42</sup> Sympathy was expressed even for radical members of the Agrarian League, who faced an uphill battle because of the Finance Reform fiasco in Berlin.<sup>43</sup>

Because the heat of the campaign varied tremendously across Saxony’s ninety-one Landtag constituencies, officials worried that a local race might spontaneously combust. Many a hot campaign escaped the attention of district and regional governors or was too close to call. Elsewhere, expected fireworks failed to ignite and produced humdrum contests. The trouble was, no one knew where a fire brigade might be needed next. Reporting from the 16th and 21st urban constituencies, which included such working-class cities as Crimmitschau, the regional governor wrote nine days before the election that, outwardly, little in the way of an election campaign could be noticed. “*However, . . . a surprise cannot be ruled out either*” because, in this district, “a large number of Social Democratic ballots will be cast.”<sup>44</sup> This governor regretted that candidates representing the Saxon *Mittelstand* Union and the left-liberal Radical People’s Party had been nominated late in the day as token candidates. Now they endangered the re-election of the wealthy industrialist (and landed estate owner) Robert Merkel in the 22nd urban riding, where the “highly industrial working-class population” would have more influence under the new suffrage. As it happened, the Radical candidate was more than just an also-ran: he prevented Merkel from winning a majority of the ballots in the first round. The run-off produced one of many instances where the SPD candidate won the support of more than half the voters in the constituency (56 percent) but fewer than half the ballots cast. Saxony’s plural suffrage boosted Merkel to victory.<sup>45</sup>

Neither possible defeat nor certain victory prevented Saxon Conservatives and like-minded National Liberals from linking the new style of Landtag campaigning with the urgent threat posed by Social Democracy. This rhetoric escalated immediately after the main ballot on 21 October 1909. “*Never before* has Saxony experienced an election struggle like the one of the last few weeks,” declared one Conservative contributor to *Das Vaterland*; “*Never before* have the passions of the people been aroused and goaded as they have been this time!” Taking comfort that the liberal parties had done poorly in the first round of balloting, this writer objected to liberal back-biting, which included blaming the Right for having toppled Chancellor Bülow. “*And yet,*” for the coming run-off elections “against the *common foe*, we must . . . *close up ranks firmly: now it is a question of battle against Social Democracy all along the line and to the bitter end!*”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> KHMS Chemnitz to Mdl, 27.7.09; AHMS Dippoldiswalde to KHMS Dresden, 6.7.09; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>43</sup> On Cons. estate-owner Andrä, running in rural 13: Dippoldiswalde, see AHM Dr. Georg Böhme (Freiberg) to KHM Rumpelt (Dresden), 23.7.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5351. Andrä was defeated by an NL with SD help.

<sup>44</sup> KHMS Zwickau to Mdl, 12.10.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5351. Merkel also sat for 22: Auerbach in the RT, where, like Stresemann before him, he belonged to the VSI and represented the left wing of the NLP.

<sup>45</sup> *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 236.

<sup>46</sup> *Vaterl.*, 1.11.09 (original emphasis).

The Social Democrats responded in kind. "A new Reich chancellor has taken Bülow's place," declared one SPD broadside, "but the system remains the same: *the politics of conquest, militarism, naval craziness, police, and violence.*" These aspects of German politics, old and new, were "*undermining the foundations of the German Reich.*"<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, many National Liberals fanned the flames of discontent. Their official organ in Saxony offered polemics against the Conservatives and the Agrarian League, spicing rhetorical questions with apocalyptic pronouncements: "One wracks one's brains. Is it conceivable . . . that there, in Berlin, a Junkerdom that wallows in its own consciousness of power simply moves over to a tax dictatorship and, with the power-lusting Center [Party], resolves upon a brutal rape of the German people? Indeed, how can such a thing be possible?"<sup>48</sup>

Vitriol among the "state-supporting" parties spilled over into assessments of what the 1909 election really meant. As soon as the campaign was over, the Austrian envoy in Dresden illustrated the pervasive effect of social militarism on Germany's electoral culture. To him, election contests were indistinguishable from military campaigns. The Saxon SPD had achieved a "glorious victory" and a "smashing success" (*Bombenerfolg*). The "extraordinary organization of Social Democratic forces" had carried the day in Saxony, he reported to Vienna: "The election drill showed itself to be exemplary . . . The [SPD's] leaders sent one squadron of electors after another to the voting urn and, at the last moment, brought up unknown reserve troops, who decided the victory." With obvious disdain, this envoy concluded that Saxony's "parties of order" could muster neither a respectable "defense of their positions" nor even "that élan which distinguishes every aggressor."<sup>49</sup>

#### PERTURBED

What went so wrong for the "parties of order"? They were vexed on many fronts, but three aspects of this election held lessons for the future: (1) the failure of small-arms combat to defeat the socialist foe; (2) the combination of indecision and hypocrisy among liberals; and (3) miscalculations about the effect of the new suffrage. In each case, we have to consider the participants' expectations going into battle as well as their responses to victory or defeat.

(1) The new suffrage law compelled Vitzthum's government to hold the first round of balloting in all Saxon constituencies on the same day. Beyond that requirement, the Saxon government bowed to pressure from the "parties of order" and its own administrators to make things as difficult as possible for Social Democrats. The "policy of pin-pricks" from the 1890s—harassment by any means available—continued in 1909. Ignoring the long-standing demand of Social Democrats that elections be held on a Sunday, when the working classes could more easily (and with no lost wages) cast their vote, Vitzthum's government decreed that the main

<sup>47</sup> "Arbeiter, Handwerker, Landleute des 10. Reichstagswahlkreises!," SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>48</sup> "Wehren wir uns!" *NLVBl*, 15.6.09.

<sup>49</sup> Fürstenberg, 8.11.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

ballot (21 October) would fall on a Thursday. Vitzthum intentionally delayed announcing the date until early October. Conservatives and the government both wanted the shortest possible campaign.<sup>50</sup> Paul Mehnert also urged Saxon ministers to hold the run-offs as quickly as possible to dampen SPD campaigning—just as he had advised Bülow for the Reichstag elections of 1907.

The law stipulated that polls had to be open a minimum of four hours. Whereas it was possible that the polls could be closed as early as 2 p.m., generally they remained open until 4 p.m. or later. This did not satisfy the Agrarian League's director in Saxony, Oswin Schmidt. After complaining that *any* polling day in October was inconvenient for farmers bringing in a late harvest, Schmidt petitioned the government to allow polls to remain open until 7 p.m. Schmidt's plea was premised on the "danger . . . that farmers, artisans, and many others like them don't want to be forced to lose any time in the middle of the day but rather will go to vote only after work." It would not be possible, Schmidt continued, "to bring the largest proportion of right-thinking voters to the voting urn before 4 o'clock in the afternoon." Therefore he asked the ministry to instruct its district governors to open the polls "a little later" in the morning and keep them open until 7 o'clock in the evening. Such instructions, he claimed, would "deprive Social Democracy of a powerful advantage."<sup>51</sup> Georg Heink's hands were tied: Article 16 of the suffrage law stipulated that polls had to open at 10 a.m.—which already made it difficult or impossible for working men to vote before the day's first shift. However, a circular was drafted for returning officers specifically in rural voting districts, asking them to accommodate "those voters who in many cases can vote only after work." Polls should remain open "until 7 p.m. and by no means be closed before 6 p.m."<sup>52</sup>

A few days later, the interior ministry received a request from the National Liberal Reich Association in Dresden. Drawing attention to the precedent set during the 1907 Reichstag elections, it asked that civil servants be allowed "a few hours of free time on 21 October" to make sure they had time to vote.<sup>53</sup> Since those "few hours" would presumably be made available around mid-day, when a middle-class voter was likely to take his hot meal at home rather than eat a hurried snack on the shop floor, as many working-class voters were forced to do, this request, too, sought to increase turnout among "right-thinking voters." The interior ministry also asked the war ministry to schedule military exercises in the autumn of 1909 in a way that would allow soldiers to vote twice: on 21 October and in the run-off elections. Despite worries that Social Democratic sympathies were found in the lower ranks of both the civil service and the military, the government clearly wanted these soldiers of the state to defend it—literally and figuratively.<sup>54</sup> When higher

<sup>50</sup> Documents in SHStAD, Mdl 5351 and 5456.

<sup>51</sup> Schmidt to Mdl, 8.10.09; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>52</sup> Mdl memoranda of 10./11.10.09 (drafts) to AHMS; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>53</sup> Vorstand des Nationalliberalen Deutschen Reichsvereins, Dresden, to Mdl, 14.10.09; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>54</sup> Saxon Mdl to Saxon Ministry of War (draft), 22.9.09; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.



civil servants in Saxony responded positively to requests like Schmidt's, they did not cross the line of legality. But they came close.<sup>55</sup>

When a vote was cast mattered in other ways. The new electoral law stipulated that run-off elections had to be held within two weeks of the main election. Therefore they had to take place on or before Thursday, 4 November 1909. For Vitzthum's government and the "parties of order," it was bad enough that Saxon voters were summoned to the polls all at the same time on 21 October. That they should all vote together a second time was worrying, especially because a run-off ballot was required in almost two-thirds of all constituencies. Therefore the second round was spread out as widely as possible over the next fortnight.<sup>56</sup> Leipzig's city council sent a prickly note to officials in Dresden complaining about the difficulty of organizing its run-offs quickly.<sup>57</sup> But the government agreed with Mehnert: compressing the time between the main and run-off elections would deprive the SPD of the opportunity to focus (or spread) its message. So the complaint of Leipzig counselors fell on deaf ears in Dresden.

Conservatives were upset, second, that the left-wing parties used slide projectors to shine voting results on the facades of public buildings, not after accurate reporting could be ensured but on election night itself (see Figure 13.2 in the next chapter). Between the main and the run-off elections, the "parties of order" appealed to the Saxon government to ban these public slide-shows, which they likened to circus side-shows. Civil servants again took no action. But when it came time—third—to hold a by-election (upon the death of a sitting Landtag deputy), the "parties of order" appealed to the interior ministry with more success. Their goal was to have the by-election scheduled within one year of 21 October 1909. If no more than a year elapsed, new voters lists would not be required. This was important because new lists would be affected by another SPD "ploy." According to this tactic, SPD supporters were encouraged to move from an unassailable Social Democratic bastion to a nearby constituency where the outcome might be decided by an influx of working-class voters. For Reichstag elections, this had been happening in and around Leipzig for some time: workers were moving from the SPD stronghold of 13: Leipzig-County (with its working-class suburbs) to the National Liberal-dominated 12: Leipzig-City. In 1910, National Liberals used language likely to appeal to state authorities when they asked that the Landtag by-election in Leipzig V be held before 21 October. "It is well known that people from other neighborhoods are commandeered into the [twelfth] [Reichstag] election district. If this were a fair method, no objection could be raised. [But] the bourgeois parties are not in a position to adopt this means, and they would be ashamed to do so too, because they have to regard it as an unfair influence on the election outcome." What to do? National Liberals thought the answer was obvious: "If the bourgeois

<sup>55</sup> See SPD calls to monitor such chicanery: "Auf zur Landtagswahl!," "Zur Landtagswahl," "Auf zu einer roten Landtagswahl!" SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>56</sup> Held on 28.10 (6 run-offs), 30.10 (1), 1.11 (4), 2.11 (36), 3.11 (2), and 4.11 (9). *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 221.

<sup>57</sup> Rat der Stadt Leipzig to Mdl, 22.10.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5352.

parties, out of self-respect, do not make use of this means, but the action of Social Democracy still leads to a falsification of the real result, then it appears only right . . . to vote on the basis of the existing [voters] lists." For interior ministry officials, this logic was compelling. They obliged the National Liberals and quickly scheduled the by-election in Leipzig V for 18 October 1910.<sup>58</sup> All in all, Social Democrats won only one of four Landtag by-elections held in 1910 and 1911.

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(2) "It's only a bunker mentality if everyone is allowed into the bunker." Whoever coined these words might have been describing the plight of Saxon liberals in general—and left liberals in particular—during the autumn of 1909. Liberals occupied the shifting middle ground between the extremes of Left and Right. For the SPD on the left, struggles between its revisionist and "orthodox" wings played no real role in the Landtag campaign: August Bebel's visit to Saxony did not create much of a stir. On the right, it mattered little whether a candidate was a Conservative, Free Conservative, radical agrarian, antisemite, or *Mittelständler*. Not so for National Liberals, who remained divided between right and left wings within their Saxon party. And not so for left liberals.<sup>59</sup>

Like his predecessor Count Hohenthal, Count Vitzthum was said to be a "moderate" liberal and even a "liberal" conservative. But as Eyre Crowe and others attested, the Vitzthums were not known for their intelligence. A charitable observer might sympathize with Vitzthum's predicament: after the demise of the Bülow Bloc in July 1909, he was unsure which way the political wind was blowing. On four counts Vitzthum shared Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's dilemma: how to "educate" the Conservatives and bring them back into the governmental fold; how to convince liberals to rein in their reformist zeal and provide an alternative to the "Black-Blue Bloc";<sup>60</sup> how to prevent Social Democracy from using the Finance Reform debacle to win more recruits; and how to move the country forward without undermining existing institutions of state.<sup>61</sup> In trying to square this four-sided circle Vitzthum marginalized liberalism in his thinking. He expressed disdain for both wings of Saxon liberalism before, during, and after the election.<sup>62</sup> An appraisal of his response to this political challenge should not be *too* charitable.

Everyone expected that the Radicals and the National Liberals would benefit from the new Landtag suffrage. As parties of the educated and propertied bourgeoisie, their supporters would be eligible to cast more ballots than those of the working classes and the *Mittelstand*. And as parties of the middle, they would

<sup>58</sup> Wahlausschuss für die nationalliberale Kandidatur im V. Leipziger Wahlkreise to Mdl, 2.7.10, SHStAD, Mdl 5352. Further by-election details (1910–14) in SHStAD, Mdl 5353.

<sup>59</sup> "Wahlauf Ruf der Freisinnigen Volkspartei im Königreich Sachsen," SHStAD, Mdl 5351. During the campaign they were referred to variously as Radicals (*Freisinn*), as the Progressive People's Party, or as the Radical People's Party in the Kingdom of Saxony.

<sup>60</sup> "Schwarzblauer Block"—i.e. Catholic-Conservative bloc (1909–14).

<sup>61</sup> Vaterl., 15.11.09; SPN, 11.11.09.

<sup>62</sup> Montgelas, 19.10.09 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 967. See also the last section of this chapter.

benefit from the novelty of run-off elections in Saxony. The real surprise is that liberals did not benefit more. Compared to the Conservatives, who won thirteen seats on the first ballot, the National Liberals faced disaster: they won only four. Anti-liberal sentiment among Saxony's civil service contributed to some liberal defeats in 1909. The left-liberal Radicals were disliked more than National Liberals. Consider the views of Baron Moritz Maximilian von Beschwitz, district governor in Zittau. Tucked in Saxony's southeastern corner, the city of Zittau had about 37,000 inhabitants and a left-liberal political tradition. "In the city of Zittau, as in the countryside," Beschwitz reported, "the Radical following, whose organ is the *Zittauer Morgenzeitung*, plays a big role. In its effort to tear down and denigrate everything the government does, this party is large, and the articles in its newspaper are often indistinguishable from those of the Social Democratic Party." The SPD press often made a more favorable impression than the Radical newspapers, he added, "because its manner and style of writing is more respectable."<sup>63</sup>

Saxon civil servants also demonstrated their antipathy to left liberalism after the 1909 elections were completed. In the 13th urban constituency (Rochlitz), which linked together seven towns northeast of Chemnitz, the mayor of one of the towns had been the left-liberal candidate. His name was Dr. Friedrich Roth—son of a master shoemaker, a former school teacher in Fürth (Bavaria) and Leipzig, and, after 1902, mayor in Burgstädt. Roth won this constituency in 1909 over Conservative, National Liberal, and Social Democratic opponents. Mirroring Saxon averages almost exactly, the Social Democrat was supported by more than 50 percent of voters in the first round of voting, but he won only 38 percent of all ballots cast. Thus a run-off was needed. Roth attracted the vast majority of non-socialist ballots in the run-off and won with a convincing 59 percent. He was popular enough that local *Mittelständler* saw no point in nominating a candidate of their own (which would have made a five-way contest in the first round). As these supporters put it, even though Roth was running on the Radical ticket, if it came down to representing *Mittelstand* interests against his own party, he was "man enough" to do so. Roth "hailed from the *Mittelstand*, was formerly a teacher, worked his way up through tireless study, and is well-versed about the trials and tribulations and demands of the *Mittelstand*." He deserved the votes of *Mittelständler* because he "knows where the shoe pinches."<sup>64</sup>

A protest was launched against Roth's election. There seemed to be more National Liberal than Social Democratic complainants when charges of influence-peddling were debated on the floor of the Landtag.<sup>65</sup> Roth prevailed. However, when he was elected mayor of Zittau in 1912, the Saxon administration refused to endorse his election (as it had done when liberals were nominated as mayors in the 1850s). Regional Governor Friedrich von Craushaar declared

<sup>63</sup> AHM Beschwitz (Zittau) to Mdl, "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1908" (20.1.09), excerpt; SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

<sup>64</sup> Franz Heinze to the Vorsitzender der Versammlung der Mittelstandsvereinigung zu Narsdorf, 9.9.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5352.

<sup>65</sup> See printed matter from *LTMitt* (II.K.) (e.g. 9.5.10), SHStAD, Mdl 5352.

categorically that “a Radical man is not suited for this post.” This was an echo of Kaiser Wilhelm’s comment to Bülow: “the [left] Liberals just aren’t gentlemen.”<sup>66</sup> Zittau’s municipal assembly rallied to Roth’s defense. It submitted a unanimous protest against Craushaar’s decision to the interior ministry in Dresden, and Roth’s Radical colleagues interpellated the government on the floor of the Landtag. But Roth’s opponents piled on too. They agreed with Beschwitz that a left liberal was likely dishonest, and they echoed Craushaar by noting that such a man was not likely to respect authority. Thus the systematic demolition of Roth’s moral reputation began. It included accusations of a gambling addiction and more. Fed up, Roth declared himself an independent (*Wild*) and left the Radical Party altogether. Yet he did not resign his Landtag seat: he represented Saxony’s 13th urban constituency until 1918 and beyond.

During the election campaign Vitzthum was concerned that Conservatives and National Liberals would ratchet up their agitation against each other to the point that Social Democrats, not Radicals, would reap the benefits. An inspired article in the governmental *Leipziger Zeitung* tried to defuse the metaphorical bombs being hurled between the two largest “parties of order” as a result of the Finance Reform crisis. Vitzthum showed that he had no sympathy for liberal negativism of either the Radical or National Liberal variety. “One should look *forward*. . . . If one wants to drive an automobile and, out of anger, looks backward to complain, one fails to see an obstacle that is thrown in one’s path and will soon lose direction and leave the path.” This, in Vitzthum’s view, was precisely what Saxon liberals had been doing for too long. “Unfruitful retrospective reflection about things that can no longer be changed uses up energy and deadens the spirit. The nervous stirring up of the people without a clear, firm goal necessarily creates among the masses disgruntled tension, revulsion, and exhaustion—a reaction that . . . suffocates all joy in the Fatherland and hobbles all patriotic energy.” The consequences of ignoring such advice had to be spelled out for liberals and, indeed, for all “right-thinking” Saxon voters. To the combatants engaged in these struggles, Vitzthum posed three questions: “Do you really imagine that you will be able to deal with Social Democracy after you have annihilated your Conservative or your liberal opponent? Do you not see how Social Democracy stands there laughing as the third party, rubs its hands together, and blows on the flame? What will that lead to?”<sup>67</sup>

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(3) Saxony’s 1909 Landtag election was “arithmetical” in many senses. Only two things about the election could be predicted with any certainty. Ninety-one election battles occurring at the same time would give the Landtag campaign the same “passionate” tone that had become a hallmark of Reichstag elections. And turnout rates were sure to rise. This forecast was as safe as any weatherman might hope for: Bavaria and Austria had experienced similar jumps in the first test of new

<sup>66</sup> Cited (n.d.) in Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 55.

<sup>67</sup> Typed draft (3.9.09) of an article for the *LZ*; SHStAD, Mdl 5352.

suffrages enacted there.<sup>68</sup> Yet a contributor to the *Nationalliberales Vereinsblatt* captured another truth about this campaign. After it was over, he remarked how badly Saxony's "energetic" statisticians had missed the mark with their "probability calculations." Everyone had been busy "adding, subtracting, dividing, in order to be sure that the new suffrage provided guarantees against the rise of the 'red factor.' And now things have turned out differently after all." The election had demonstrated that "political power relations are hard to calculate beforehand." Playing on the word "vote" (*Stimme*), this writer reminded his readers that the electorate's "mood" (*Stimmung*) is "not an arithmetical concept."<sup>69</sup>

During the election campaign, each party tried to lower expectations.<sup>70</sup> This too approximated the safe weather forecast of a sun-cloud mix. The Social Democrats told their faithful that they must not judge the outcome of the election by the number of seats the SPD won. The new suffrage, they claimed, would prevent their party from winning a seat even in some constituencies where its supporters constituted 60–70 percent of all voters. (They were right.) They also noted that the general political mood would not likely be as favorable when the new suffrage was tested a second time six years later. The Radicals had good reason to expect that their core supporters among the educated bourgeoisie would benefit from plural voting.<sup>71</sup> But then they failed to elect a single deputy in the first round, and their confidence crumbled. So did party unity. Some supporters voted for Social Democrats in run-off elections, others for Conservatives. Oskar Günther had no convincing response to charges that his party was both indecisive and hypocritical.

For their part, Saxony's National Liberals experienced the Ikea effect—whereby people ascribe a higher value to something they have helped put together themselves. For the plural suffrage they had devised in 1908, the National Liberals had nothing but praise; but they expected better results than they got. Between the main and the run-off ballots, the party put on a good face. It expressed satisfaction that the "parties of order" faced each other in only four run-off contests. The election of about forty liberals and twenty socialists seemed likely: "In such a heavily industrialized land" as Saxony, and "given the present situation, which is particularly advantageous for Social Democracy," the prospect of SPD candidates "winning about 2/9ths of the seats does not seem so fearful to us at all."<sup>72</sup> Conservatives hoped only to avoid the worst.<sup>73</sup>

Less partisan observers made their own forecasts. Two months before the election, government leader Vitzthum believed the SPD would "barely win 12, at

<sup>68</sup> Ucakar, *Demokratie*, 360–1; Niehuss, "Schichtungsanalyse," 220. Turnout for Bavarian LT elections e.g. rose from 39 percent (1899) to 72 percent (1907) after the suffrage reform of 1906.

<sup>69</sup> *NLVBl*, 15.11.09.

<sup>70</sup> See LWRK, 232–3; election flyers in SLUB, H. Sax. J. 123, 109w; SPD flyers and newspaper clippings in GStAM, Rep. 77 [Pr. MdI], CB S, No. 80, Bd. II.

<sup>71</sup> Langerhans, "Wahlrechtskompromiß," 6. Cf. Gagel, *Wahlrechtsfrage*; Nonn, "Populismus"; Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 44–53.

<sup>72</sup> *Nationale Blätter. Deutsche Stimme*, 31.10.09.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. *Vaterl.*, 15.10.09, which claimed the following lineup of candidates: 89 for Cons, BdL, SMVgg, or Reformers, with another 5 independent AS; 69 NLs; 34 LLs; and 91 SDs.

most 13 seats in the new Landtag.”<sup>74</sup> If the SPD gained so few seats, this would allow him to follow his own *Blockpolitik* in the new Landtag; it would also “confirm once again that Social Democracy, even in Saxony, . . . has taken on the character of a movement in retreat.” In the last fortnight before the main ballot, it began to dawn on Vitzthum and Finance Minister Rüger that more than thirteen Social Democrats might be elected.<sup>75</sup> But when fifteen “reds” won on the first ballot, Vitzthum succumbed again to over-confidence: he did not revise his estimate upward to reflect the final outcome. Based on the premise that the “parties of order” would unite in the run-offs, and ignoring warnings from his district governors, Vitzthum foresaw the SPD adding only “3 or 4” more seats to the fifteen they had won. Social Democrats predicted the final outcome more accurately: they counted on “at least two dozen seats” in the next Landtag.<sup>76</sup>

In faraway London, and months earlier, the British Foreign Office recognized that the new suffrage would give extra ballots to more Saxon workers than the government expected. Its honorary attaché in Dresden had reported that plural voting would “enable a large proportion of the working classes to acquire two votes, and in many cases even three.”<sup>77</sup> With mixed sentiments the British Foreign Office recognized that “the [Saxon] Bill, which is a compromise, is a considerable advance in a democratic sense,” because “the property qualification entitling to extra votes is fixed very low.” Why mixed sentiments? In 1909, as they had been in 1868, British observers were concerned that Saxony should not rush headlong toward universal suffrage. In the intervening years Britain had passed the Third Reform Act of 1884/85, enfranchising a large though “prudent” proportion of skilled laborers. But Britons did not yet envision the Fourth Reform Act of 1918. The British envoy wrote from Dresden that the new suffrage would “by no means satisfy the aspirations of the bulk of the population.” The “compromise” worked out by National Liberals and Conservatives was nothing more than a “*pis aller*.” Hence popular unrest might continue—something the British never wanted to witness across the North Sea.<sup>78</sup> In London’s Foreign Office, a minute attached to these reports sounded distinctly unhappy. Far from seeing a “considerable advance,” this writer observed that “The Conservatives have done all they could to hinder any serious reform of the franchise.” Another wondered how the new system could possibly work: “Extra votes for education will necessitate an exam!”

Foreign observers in January 1909 correctly forecast something else that Vitzthum discovered only in November. The first test of the new suffrage was

<sup>74</sup> Acting Pr. envoy Heyl, 22.8.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Fürstenberg, 27.10.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>76</sup> LVZ, 3.11.09, reporting on 2.11.09 when only eleven of fifty-eight run-off results were known.

<sup>77</sup> Findlay (14.1.09) and Trench (19.1.09), to Br. FO, with FO minutes of 25.1.09, PRO, FO 371/671, BFO-CP, reel 23, no. 2326. Trench added: “The majority of the skilled workmen possess an income of over £80 [corresponding to 1,600 Marks], and a considerable number dispose of one exceeding £110 [corresponding to 2,200 Marks].”

<sup>78</sup> Findlay, 14.1.09, cited previously. On British views of Germany 1815–1914, see works discussed in Retallack, *Germany’s Second Reich*, ch. 2.

awaited with “fear” by the upper classes: they “dread the tide of socialism in Saxony, which they seem powerless to stem.”<sup>79</sup> Although the new suffrage was less plutocratic than the old one, its effects were “incalculable, not least because of the age ballot.” The *Mittelstand* had received “new and valuable privileges” and the working classes had at least gained something. But it remained “an open question how many workers and how many little people in total will receive—apart from the age ballot—an extra ballot.”<sup>80</sup> Saxons faced a leap in the dark.

If Vitzthum failed to foresee that only a few constituency races would pit a single representative of the “parties of order” against a Social Democrat, those parties shared this error in judgment. They believed that, as in January 1907, they could maximize the non-socialist turnout by “marching separately and striking together.” There is no need to downplay the advantage the run-off system provided the non-socialist parties. Yet, in October and November 1909, the new voters who were mobilized by the novelty of a general election included a large proportion of workers, fellow travelers, and even “right-thinking burghers” who, this time, were inclined to cast a protest vote. Thousands of them did so because of economic hardship, but many others were disgusted that the non-socialist parties were feuding among themselves more bitterly than at any time since the 1890s.

When the run-off elections were just getting underway, the Bavarian envoy Montgelaß predicted that “under their own power the Social Democrats can win only a couple of seats.” However, the fact that many run-offs were necessary at all was something both he and the Prussian envoy, Hohenlohe, noted with concern.<sup>81</sup> The latter wrote that “many run-off elections could have been avoided if the *bürgerlich* parties had cooperated more against the socialists and if they had not squandered their votes on rival candidacies.” After the election, these envoys changed their tune. Now they agreed that the SPD’s unexpected victories in the run-offs were due “mainly to a minority of [left-liberal] Radicals who had supported them.” That outcome was “all the more damnable because the Radicals won all eight of their seats with *bürgerlich* election help.” A Saxon government official, assessing the legacy of Conservative–National Liberal conflicts three years later, felt that *all* parties had conducted a campaign “more passionate” than any previous one. Competing candidacies among the “parties of order,” he wrote, had furthered the Social Democratic cause in a spectacular way.<sup>82</sup>

No crystal ball could have foretold the failure of small-arms combat as a means to keep Social Democracy in check in October–November 1909. No Saxon liberals received support *on principle* from a government still beholden to conservative views. And no statistical forecasts could account for the dozens of combinations that gave “extra” ballots to electors who wanted to cast a vote of non-confidence

<sup>79</sup> Trench, 19.1.09, cited previously.

<sup>80</sup> Montgelaß, 25.1.09 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 967, and for the following.

<sup>81</sup> Montgelaß, 24.10.09, 4.11.09 (drafts), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 967; Hohenlohe, 23.10.09, 2.12.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Oppe, “Reform,” 394.

against “the system.” The outcome of Saxony’s Landtag election in 1909 was arguably more difficult to predict than any other election in the Kaiserreich.

### PERPLEXED

Saxon Social Democracy has shattered the three-class suffrage and, with a sneer, thrown its broken shards at the feet of the propertied classes.

—Hermann Fleißner, *Die Neue Zeit* (November 1909)<sup>83</sup>

There was an Old Man who supposed,  
That the street door was partially closed;  
But some very large Rats,  
Ate his coats and his hats,  
While the futile Old Gentleman dozed.

—Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846)

Anti-socialists saw the sheer number of candidates in October 1909 as an ominous sign. Social Democrats fielded a candidate in every Saxon constituency. The coalition of Conservatives and the Agrarian League ran sixty-two candidates, the antisemitic Reformers ran seven, and the Saxon *Mittelstand* Union fifteen. The National Liberals fielded seventy-five candidates and the Radicals thirty-two.

After the main ballot on 21 October, things looked bad. The extreme Right and extreme Left were almost deadlocked, with fourteen Conservative seats and fifteen Social Democratic seats already decided.<sup>84</sup> The antisemites and Radicals had not won a single seat in the first round, and the National Liberals had won only four. As fifty-eight run-off elections loomed, the Social Democrats faced poor odds. They had a candidate in fifty-four run-offs, but almost everywhere they could expect the “parties of order” to unite and carry the day. Vitzthum “confidently expected” that, after the first “onslaught” had been weathered, the SPD would conquer only “a few more” in the run-offs.<sup>85</sup> He was wrong. On 5 November 1909—Guy Fawkes Day in Britain—no fireworks lit the Saxon sky. Just as well: good burghers might have thought *the* revolution had finally begun. Instead, Saxons took stock of the final election tally (the last run-off elections had been completed the previous evening). The Conservatives and National Liberals were now exactly matched in the new Landtag with twenty-eight seats each, while the Social Democrats had very nearly the same number, twenty-five. The Social Democrats had won ten of the run-offs in which they competed: in six they defeated a Conservative, in four a National Liberal. Now “the reds” held over one-quarter of Landtag seats. Was this a good or a bad showing for the SPD in the second round? Contemporaries were stunned by the Social Democrats’ victories in the run-offs—more so than by their success in

<sup>83</sup> NZ 28 (1909/10), H. 7, 1:233–8, at 234f. (12.11.09).

<sup>84</sup> All fourteen of those Cons. won in rural WKe. One was RFKP and is sometimes listed separately in the sources.

<sup>85</sup> Fürstenberg, 27.10.09, HHStAV, PAV/54.



the first round. The “state-supporting” parties had been unable (or unwilling) to unite against the socialist enemy. They had also been blindsided by the very suffrage they had devised: it hadn’t delivered the goods.

The maps on pages 508–9 will help readers assess the impact of Landtag suffrage reform on Saxony’s historical geography, while two maps included among the color plates in this book depict the result of the 1909 Landtag election. Maps 12.1 and 12.2 show the ninety-one Landtag constituencies legislated as part of the 1909 reform (increased in number from the previous eighty-two). As they had been since 1868, Saxony’s constituencies were divided among three categories: big-city constituencies (N=20), other urban constituencies (N=23), and rural constituencies (N=48). The rural constituencies are shown on Map 12.1. Rural constituency 1: Zittau is in the kingdom’s southeast corner; rural constituency 48: Plauen-Auerbach is in the west.<sup>86</sup>

Map 12.2 depicts Saxony’s urban constituencies. The white (unnumbered) islands shown on both maps for Dresden, Leipzig, Chemnitz, Plauen, and Zwickau constituted the twenty big-city constituencies. Of these, seven were allocated to each of Dresden and Leipzig, four to Chemnitz, and one each to Plauen and Zwickau.<sup>87</sup> The twenty-three “other urban” constituencies are numbered from 1: Zittau in the southeast to 23: Adorf in the southwest. These constituencies hovered like islands in (or above) a sea of rural constituencies—just as they had after the suffrage reforms of 1868 and 1896. They joined up a collection of towns and cities in a given geographical area, but they were entirely distinct from the rural constituencies in the same area (as they were also entirely distinct from the big-city constituencies). The number of towns and cities grouped into a single “other urban” constituency varied greatly, from a low of two for 16: Crimmitschau to a high of fifteen for 5: Dippoldiswalde.<sup>88</sup>

No elector was eligible to vote in more than one constituency, even though he might be eligible to cast one, two, or three extra ballots. An elector living in and around the city of Plauen in Saxony’s southwest corner, for example, would be eligible to vote in only one of three different types of constituency, depending on precisely where he resided. He might vote in the big-city constituency of Plauen itself; he might vote in the rural constituency of 44: Plauen; or he might vote in “other urban” 22: Netzschkau if he resided in one of the seven towns north of Plauen (one of which was named Netzschkau). As in this example, the town or city for which an “other urban” constituency was named was usually, but not always, the largest in the area. The small city of Borna, situated about thirty kilometers south of Leipzig and with a population of about 12,000 in 1900, lent its name to

<sup>86</sup> The numbers do not follow a consistent pattern from east to west because three new rural constituencies were added in the 1909 reform. Note e.g. that rural 24: Dresden-Neustadt and rural 46: Dresden-Neustadt-Pirna are to the north and east of Dresden’s city center.

<sup>87</sup> Color maps in the Online Supplement show the voting result (1909) in Dresden I to VII, Leipzig I to VII, and Chemnitz I to IV: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>88</sup> In the case of 16: Crimmitschau, the textile-dominated city itself was paired only with the town of Werda. In the “other urban” constituency of 5: Dippoldiswalde, the following towns were included: Dohna, Rabenau, Dippoldiswalde, Frauenstein, Sayda, Lengefeld, Altenberg, Geising, Bärenstein, Glashütte, Lauenstein, Liebstadt, Gottleuba, Berggießhübel, and Brand. The composition of all ninety-one LT WKe after 1909 is listed in *SParl*, 195–7.

the “other urban” constituency of 12: Borna, which included Borna, Taucha, Rötha, and six other towns around Leipzig (hence nine dots are joined together by the small circle “12” lying just south of Leipzig on Map 12.2).<sup>89</sup> Those nine towns hovered in (or above) two different rural constituencies (22: Taucha and 25: Borna). As in this example, the rural constituencies were usually named (in shorthand)<sup>90</sup> after the largest town in the area, even though electors in those towns would vote in an “other urban” constituency.

Insofar as astonishment among the “parties of order” was genuine when the 1909 election results were announced, how do we assess its significance? Three strategies seem fruitful. (1) We can determine how often the non-socialist parties failed to unite to prevent an SPD victory. (2) We can study one urban constituency to gauge the importance of the working-class vote in helping a left liberal defeat a National Liberal. And (3) We can examine the kinds of occupations that qualified Saxon voters for extra ballots according to income.

The exercise of coming to grips with unpalatable election returns was lampooned when *Simplicissimus* published a cartoon titled “Reading of the Election Result” (see Plate 10). As voting returns pour in from a Reichstag election,<sup>91</sup> the liberal burgher becomes more and more agitated that Social Democratic ballots massively outnumber liberal ones. His conclusion is that such defeats will give the state-supporting parties “fresh energy” to fight election battles in the future, though one should also “weigh votes, not count them.”<sup>92</sup> Did the 1909 result give fresh energy to those who opposed one of democracy’s defining features, the equal ballot? The short answer is no—and yes.

\*

(1) *Measuring anti-socialist unity.* Considering only Saxony’s largest non-socialist parties, the Conservatives and National Liberals failed to unite in thirty-eight of ninety-one constituencies—42 percent of the total.<sup>93</sup> In Saxony’s twenty big-city constituencies, serious disunity between them occurred in exactly half (ten) of these. In one instance a left liberal profited from such disunity; in six instances another non-socialist candidate prevailed; and in two instances a Social Democrat won. In Saxony’s twenty-three “other urban” ridings, anti-socialist unity fell apart in seven constituencies—almost 30 percent. In two instances a left liberal won the

<sup>89</sup> Most “other urban” constituencies in 1909 included the same towns and cities that they had since 1868, even though the actual placement of connecting lines on the 1909 map differs from those shown among this book’s color plates and in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>90</sup> The rural constituency of 22: Taucha, like other rural constituencies, was actually designated according to the administrative district(s) in which electors resided. In this case its more official designation was “Südwestlicher und östlicher Teil der AHMS Leipzig und angrenzende Teile der AHMS Borna und Grimma.”

<sup>91</sup> Not a Landtag election.

<sup>92</sup> “Verlesung des Wahlergebnisses,” by Wilhelm Schulz, *Simplicissimus* 16, Nr. 40, Wahlnummer (1.1.12): 720.

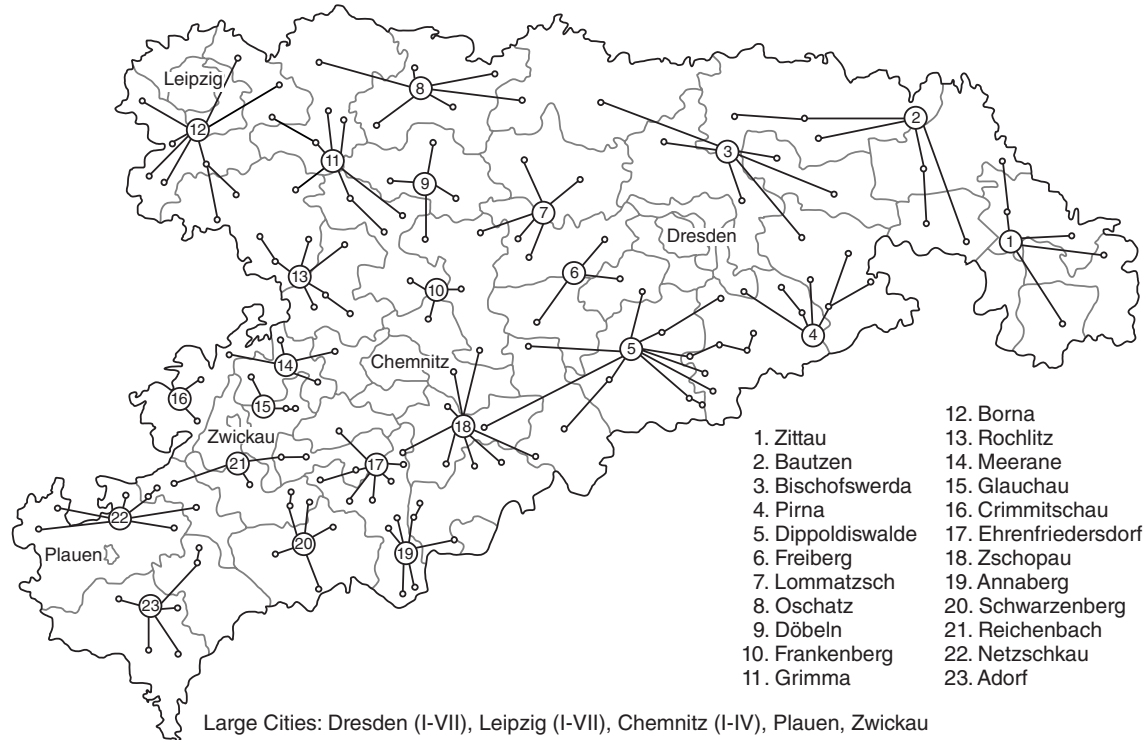
<sup>93</sup> I first proposed criteria for judging anti-socialist disunity in Retallack, “What Is to Be Done?”; cf. Ritter, “Wahlrecht” (1990), esp. 89–97; Ritter, “Wahlen” (1997), 77–84; LWRK, 232–41; RWA; SLTW; *SParl*.

# Saxon Landtag Elections, 1909

## Rural Constituencies



**Map 12.1.** Saxon Landtag Constituencies (rural), 1909. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved. See color plates and online maps for the 1909 Landtag election results, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. Maps 12.1 and 12.2 drawn by Cherie Northon, Mapping Solutions, Alaska, from data provided by the author.



Map 12.2. Saxon Landtag Constituencies (urban), 1909. © 2017 James Retallack. All rights reserved.

seat, and in one a socialist prevailed. Among Saxony's forty-eight "rural" constituencies, disunity between Conservatives and National Liberals was evident in twenty-one of them, roughly 44 percent. In those twenty-one rural constituencies, Social Democrats chalked up seven victories.

A tally of all constituency contests is shown in Table 12.4. In the run-off ballots, the "parties of order" tried to exploit all the advantages they enjoyed under the new suffrage. One of the Conservatives' run-off victories was in the 5th urban constituency, which has already attracted our attention because it included fifteen far-flung towns high in the Erzgebirge. Here the SPD candidate won the support of 78 percent of all voters who turned out for the run-off; but because the Conservative Dresden lawyer Dr. Hans Spieß benefited substantially from the plural voting system, the Social Democrat won only 42 percent of the run-off ballots and lost. A similar situation prevailed in the big-city constituency of Dresden II, where the National Liberal caucus leader Franz Hettner won.<sup>94</sup> On this occasion, 81 percent of all voters supported the Social Democratic candidate in the run-off; but because of the plural suffrage, he won just 30 percent of the ballots—another stinging defeat. As for the Radicals, they won all eight of the run-offs they contested. In seven of these, Social Democrats were the losers; in one it was a National Liberal.

\*

2. *Liberals and other Germans.* That eighth left-liberal victory unfolded in Saxony's extreme southeast.<sup>95</sup> The urban constituency of 1: Zittau can help readers better understand election results elsewhere in the kingdom.<sup>96</sup> In the Landtag election of 1909, of the four "rural" constituencies that surrounded Zittau, one was won by a Social Democrat and three were won by Conservatives.<sup>97</sup> In national elections on either side of 1909, left liberals, National Liberals, and Social Democrats all scored victories in this corner of Saxony. Politically complex and in flux, can 1: Zittau help us establish a correlation between voters' socio-economic status and their willingness to support a Social Democrat or a liberal under the plural suffrage? Yes, it can.

In the Landtag election of 1909, the left-liberal candidate in 1: Zittau was Ernst Schwager. He had worked his way up from a typesetter for the leftist *Zittauer Morgenzeitung* to become its publisher; he also sat on Zittau's city council.<sup>98</sup> Schwager

<sup>94</sup> This was one of thirty-one run-off elections the NLs contested and one of the twenty-four they won.

<sup>95</sup> Readers may wish to locate rural 1: Zittau on Map 12.1 and urban 1: Zittau on Map 12.2; see also other maps in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. For LT elections, "urban" 1: Zittau included two cities and three towns that floated in (or "above") the "rural" WK of 1: Zittau as well as in (or "above") Saxony's 3rd, 4th, and 5th "rural" WKe. The inverted commas around "rural" are necessary because so many of Saxony's rural constituencies were relatively industrialized and urbanized.

<sup>96</sup> See Ritter, "Wahlen," 83, showing the relative weight of a single ballot cast for each party in 1909 according to constituency type.

<sup>97</sup> On the national plane in 1907, a LL had won the RT WK of 1: Zittau and a NL had won 2: Löbau for the Bülow Bloc. Both WKe were lost to the SPD in the RT election of 1912.

<sup>98</sup> "Kandidaten . . . 1909" (n.d.), SHStAD, Mdl 5351.

**Table 12.4.** Party Rivalries, Saxon Landtag Elections, 1909

Party	Seats won in main ballot (21 October)	Seats contested in run-off ballot (Oct.–Nov.)	Opposing candidate in run-off ballot	Seats won in the run-off ballot		Total seats won (1909)
				Won	Against	
Conservatives	14	20	1 BdL, 1 NL, 18 SPD	14	1 BdL, 13 SPD	28
Antisemites	0	2	2 SPD	2	2 SPD	2
National Liberals	4	31	1 Cons, 1 SMVgg, 1 Radical, 27 SPD	24	1 Cons, 1 MVgg, 22 SPD	28
Radicals	0	8	1 NL, 7 SPD	8	1 NL, 7 SPD	8
Social Democrats	15	54	17 Cons, 2 AS, 28 NL, 7 Radical	10	6 Cons, 4 NL	25
Totals	33			58		91

*Notes:* Totals differ slightly from those first published in the *ZSSL*. Conservatives include candidates of the RFKP, BdL, SMVgg.

*Sources:* *ZSSL 1909*; *SParl*, 69; some calculations provided to the author by Wolfgang Schröder.

beat the National Liberal incumbent Philipp Pflug, who taught book-keeping in one of Zittau's non-elite secondary schools and who belonged to the executive committee of the Saxon National Liberal Party.<sup>99</sup> The fortunes of these liberal candidates and their opponents are shown in Table 12.5, which is based on voting returns published by Saxony's Royal Statistical Office.<sup>100</sup>

The Radical Schwager won a narrow plurality (38.8 percent) of ballots in the first round of voting on 21 October. The National Liberal Pflug showed well too. The plural balloting system initially had little impact on the differential between the number of voters who supported Schwager and the total number of ballots cast on his behalf. Schwager was supported by about 37 percent of all voters and he won 39 percent of all ballots. Pflug, on the other hand, was supported by only 25 percent of all voters but he won 34 percent of all ballots. (These percentages have been rounded.) The Social Democratic candidate won 32.2 percent of voters to his side, but only 19.9 percent of ballots cast. Having placed third, he was eliminated from the run-off.

In that second ballot, Schwager won the allegiance of a huge proportion of voters with only one-ballot—87.2 percent of them. Among such voters were thousands who had voted Social Democratic in the first round. We cannot say how many voters switched from the Social Democratic candidate to Schwager in the run-off. But before the run-off was held, the SPD leadership declared that Pflug, the "National Liberal friend of the plural suffrage," had to be defeated at all costs.<sup>101</sup> The total number of voters who supported Schwager and the Social Democrat in the first round—irrespective of the number of ballots they cast—almost equals the number of voters who supported Schwager in the run-off. The same goes for the number of voters who supported Pflug and the Conservative in the first round and Pflug in the run-off.

When we consider voters with either one or four ballots, the correlations are especially strong: Conservatives tended to vote for the National Liberal Pflug in the run-off and Social Democrats tended to vote for Schwager. Among two- and three-ballot voters, the picture is more opaque. Among voters with three ballots, Schwager won 60 percent of them to his side, Pflug only 40 percent. These proportions were roughly inverted among voters with four ballots. But the support of privileged voters was not enough to help the National Liberal Pflug to victory. With Social Democratic help, Schwager won 57.8 percent of all ballots in the run-off and took the seat.

1: Zittau was typical of Saxony's twenty-three "other urban" constituencies in most respects. National Liberals or Radicals won the majority of Landtag seats in this category; Conservatives won only four and Social Democrats won only two. Yet workers constituted only 32 percent of enfranchised electors in Zittau, whereas they constituted on average 48 percent of electors in all "other urban" ridings. This put Zittau at the very bottom of the scale when measuring the proportion of

<sup>99</sup> KHM Friedrich von Craushaar (Bautzen) to MdI, 12.7.09, SHStAD, MdI 5351.

<sup>100</sup> ZSSL 1909 (1909): 225, 232; *ibid.* (1911): 27f.

<sup>101</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll... Leipzig... 1910*, 13.

**Table 12.5.** Plural Voting, by Party and Number of Ballots, 1: Zittau, 1909

Party (Name)	Total ballots won (no.)	Number of voters with . . . ballots					Total ballots won (%)	Percentage of voters with . . . ballots				
		Total (no.)	1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)		Total (%)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Main ballot												
Conservative	1,036	382	74	114	42	152	7.0	6.0	3.3	7.1	5.6	8.5
National Liberal	5,080	1,611	152	334	240	885	34.3	25.2	6.8	20.9	32.2	49.6
Radical	5,747	2,326	627	650	376	673	38.8	36.5	27.8	40.6	50.5	37.8
Social Democrat	2,949	2,057	1,396	503	85	73	19.9	32.2	62.0	31.4	11.4	4.1
Other	11	6	3	1	2	—	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	—
Total	14,823	6,382	2,252	1,602	745	1,783	100	100	100	100	100	100
Run-off ballot												
National Liberal ( <i>Philipp Pflug</i> )	6,124	2,008	263	409	301	1,035	42.2	32.7	12.8	26.0	40.0	58.6
Radical (winner) ( <i>Ernst Schwager</i> )	8,402	4,138	1,790	1,164	452	732	57.8	67.3	87.2	74.0	60.0	41.4
Total	14,526	6,146	2,053	1,573	753	1,767	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Notes:* “Other urban” 1: Zittau included five towns and cities: Zittau, Bernstadt, Löbau, Ostritz, and Weißenberg. It included 49,273 inhabitants (based on the census of 1 Dec. 1905), of whom 7,516 (15.25 percent) were enfranchised.

*Sources:* Based on *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 225, 232; *ibid.* (1911): 27–8.



enfranchised workers in this type of constituency. In fact the proportion of workers among the electorate was significantly higher in the surrounding “rural” constituencies than in the cities and town that made up 1: Zittau itself.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, over 70 percent of workers there were not privileged in any way: they had only one (“basic”) ballot to cast. About 22 percent of workers earned a second ballot only because they had already celebrated their fiftieth birthday. Conversely, 1: Zittau had a high proportion of social groups who typically supported one of the two liberal parties: businessmen, merchants, salaried employees, civil servants, clergy, teachers, and pensioners. Many electors in these groups were eligible to cast four ballots. How many workers in Zittau had *either* three or four ballots to cast? A grand total of seventy-three.<sup>103</sup>

In a perfect world, these data about the social background of enfranchised electors could be brought together with voting returns to tell us exactly which social group voted for which party. The ecological fallacy makes this impossible. Two observations mitigate the frustration we might feel over this. First, civil servants’ reports about the weakness of the Conservative Party in and around Zittau are supported by sociological evidence made available by Saxony’s plural voting system. The absolute number of privileged “independents” in agriculture was very low. So was the number of electors awarded extra ballots on the basis of an agricultural, horticultural, or wine-making enterprise. As in many constituencies of this type, the Conservatives’ core following of agrarians was weakly represented in 1: Zittau. This limited the number of votes Pflug could draw from Conservative supporters in the run-off. The liberal parties were wise to nominate a newspaper publisher and a teacher as their local candidates. A (conservative) farmer or a (socialist) worker would have made a poor showing among the townsfolk in this constituency. Second, the left-liberal Schwager benefited from Saxony’s polarized electoral culture. Once the Social Democratic candidate failed to reach the run-off in Zittau, it was obvious where most protest voters would turn. Even though the vast majority of workers had only one ballot to cast, workers were numerically strong enough—almost one-third of the electorate—to help elect a representative of the nearest party.

This example from a not-so-sleepy corner of the Reich illustrates two features of electoral politics that had become evident in the Reich by 1903 (at the latest). Left liberals over time were becoming less able to secure first-round election victories on their own strength. In the Reichstag elections of 1903, 1907, and 1912, the left liberals’ first priority was to reach the run-off ballot, when they stood a chance of

<sup>102</sup> This was true of “rural” 1: Zittau, where workers constituted 59.2 percent of enfranchised workers, as well as “rural” 3: Ostritz (50.7 percent), 4: Löbau (44.1 percent) and 5: Bautzen (46.5 percent). *ZSSL 1909* (1912): 328.

<sup>103</sup> See the figures showing the Profile of Landtag Electors, by Occupation and Age, 1: Zittau, 1909, and Plural Ballots Awarded by Category, 1: Zittau, 1909, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. The latter figure provides an English description of the criteria that allowed supplemental ballots to be awarded under the 1909 LT suffrage, using the same categories as the voting law. See Appendix 1 for an excerpt from the Saxon Voting Law of 5 May 1909 and Appendix 2 for a list of all localities in each LT constituency after 1909; both also in the Online Supplement.

drawing to their side supporters of the next-closest parties: Social Democrats and National Liberals. Moreover, left liberals' best chances of victory were in towns and villages outside big cities. This had been true even in the 1880s and 1890s; but with the SPD's growing dominance in German metropolises and the Agrarian League's strength in rural areas, it was in towns like Zittau that left liberals could hope to win seats—no matter whether they fought under the universal suffrage or a plural voting system.<sup>104</sup>

\*

3. *Workers and other Germans.* The example of 1: Zittau also prompts us to consider what types of electors—workers and others—would have had incomes high enough to qualify for extra ballots under Saxony's new suffrage.<sup>105</sup>

A good place to start is by noting that the income threshold of 2,800 Marks per annum to qualify for four ballots would have been met by a large proportion of bourgeois males in 1909. An even greater number would have exceeded the income thresholds of 2,500, 2,200, and 1,900 Marks, which were specified for salaried civil servants (and others). We can identify occupations that lay close to these thresholds for extra ballots.<sup>106</sup> Virtually all higher civil servants in late Imperial Germany exceeded Saxony's 2,800 Mark threshold for four ballots, most by a considerable margin. The salary range for higher civil servants would include, for example, a Prussian state minister (36,000 Marks p.a.) at the top of this category, to a beginning chancery secretary (4,000 Marks) near the bottom. Most members of the free professions earned more than 2,800 Marks too. A government counselor in Prussia might typically end his career with a salary of about 7,200 Marks; a judge in Prussia with about 6,000 Marks; a head teacher or schoolmaster in Prussia, Bavaria, or Saxony with just under 5,000 Marks; a circuit judge or priest in Bavaria with about 4,800 Marks; a physician in Saxony with about 3,500 Marks.

What of occupations that fell into the range between 1,400 and 2,800 Marks of annual income, whose members became eligible for one, two, or three extra ballots in Saxony? Such electors were either solidly middle class, belonged to the upper ranks of the *Mittelstand*, or belonged to the "aristocracy" of skilled workers. A chancery clerk might earn a salary of about 3–4,000 Marks, but that would be

<sup>104</sup> See Fairbairn, *Democracy*; Thomson, *Left Liberals*; Sperber, *Voters*.

<sup>105</sup> Apart from the UK and US reports cited below, my examples of waged and salaried incomes are based on a variety of German and internet sources, not all of which are easily reconciled. I am grateful to Thomas Kühne, Volker Berghahn, and Simone Lässig for their guidance. See Jeck, *Wachstum*, 140–63 and passim; Gömmel, *Realeinkommen*, 16–29; Hohorst et al., *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch II*, 2nd ed., 107–14; Berghahn, *Kaiserreich*, esp. 46–51; Berghahn, *Imperial Germany*, 308–9; Pierenkemper, "Einkommensentwicklung," 71; Desai, *Real Wages*; Orsagh, "Löhne." Also [Würzburger], "Vergleich"; Böhmert, "Einkommensteuerstatistik"; Niethammer and Brüggemeier, "Arbeiter"; Maus, *Professor*, 209–19; Siegrist, *Advokat*, 1:490; Fattmann, *Bildungsbürger*, 104; Jessen, *Polizei*, 366.

<sup>106</sup> These are shown for "other urban" 1: Zittau in the figure in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>. Note the number of eligible electors who were *not* workers and who had only the one basic ballot—over 1,000 of them. Such electors may have prided themselves in being part of the old or new *Mittelstand*, but they met none of the criteria (property, income, service, or age) for preferment in LT elections.

at the high end of a salary scale that would likely have started closer to 1,800 Marks. If he began his career as a para-legal, his salary scale might have started between 1,400 and 2,000 Marks. An ordinary school-teacher might earn about 2,800 Marks a year or a little more, a village pastor about 2,600 Marks, a salaried technician about 2,400 Marks, an experienced police sergeant 2,200 Marks—about the same as a white-collar office clerk. Lower down the social ladder we come to other members of the “new” *Mittelstand* and then the “old” (though with considerable overlap). A retail clerk, generally classified as belonging to the new *Mittelstand*, might earn just under 1,800 Marks; a beginning chancery clerk or a beginning police sergeant might earn about 1,650 Marks. Other types of lower civil servants (e.g. a railway worker, a postman, or a police constable) might have a salary of 1,200 to 1,400 Marks near the outset of his career, perhaps 1,700 Marks at mid-career, and as much as 2,000 Marks upon retirement.

*Mittelstand* incomes and working-class incomes also overlapped. A miner in the Ruhr would probably earn about 1,400 Marks per year, a metalworker in southwest Germany about the same; but an “average” German worker earned closer to 1,000 Marks. Most artisans (a hugely diverse category) barely exceeded the threshold—in Prussia, 900 Marks—at which one began paying any tax at all. (In Saxony the lowest tax bracket began at 400 Marks.) And an ordinary farmer—another huge category that should be distinguished from more affluent landholders—typically earned less than 700 Marks annually.

Some of these estimates can be confirmed by a US Senate report that examined the cost of living in Germany.<sup>107</sup> They can also be compared to the findings of a similar inquest (1910) sponsored by Great Britain’s Board of Trade, which included Saxony’s five largest cities.<sup>108</sup> Tables 12.6 and 12.7 provide the American committee’s findings in both dollars and Marks. Only large social groups are shown in Table 12.6. Finer gradations are evident among the forty occupations (e.g. “blacksmiths”) listed in Table 12.7.

The most noteworthy feature of these reports is the high proportion of workers whose earnings fell below (or close to) the 1,600 Mark threshold to qualify for a second ballot in 1909. Skilled workers in industrial establishments exceeded this threshold, but only just. Unskilled and other workers fell below it. This circumstance goes a long way to explaining the government’s calculation that most workers would not qualify for a second ballot purely because of their income. However, in the US sample, 382 of 522 families surveyed had a skilled worker as head of household. Such a worker would likely qualify for at least a second ballot on the basis of his earnings and, if he were over the age of fifty, for a third. Compared to the rest of Germany, a high proportion of Saxony’s working classes were

<sup>107</sup> Documented for 852 families earning less than 3,000 Marks a year. US Senate, Select Committee, *Cost of Living in Germany*, 36. German Marks were converted to US dollars at the rate of 0.238 (p. 3). German households documented their incomes and expenditures from 1.2.07 to 31.1.08. Values in Marks were taken from the report of the Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt.

<sup>108</sup> Board of Trade, *Cost of Living*, available online from ProQuest as House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Cd. 4032. See for Chemnitz (pp. 138–49), Dresden (189–205), Leipzig (300–314), Plauen (403–414), and Zwickau (480–91). Cf. Mitchell, “Investigations.”

**Table 12.6.** Annual Earnings of Heads of Family in Germany, by Occupational Category, 1907–08

Occupation of head of family	Total families	Husband's average annual earnings	
	(no.)	(US\$)	(Marks)
A. Workers in . . .	522	369	1,549
A.I. Industrial Establishments	436	376	1,580
a. Skilled	382	384	1,614
b. Unskilled	54	318	1,335
A.II. Commerce and Transportation	53	334	1,402
A.III. Not Classified	33	329	1,382
B. Salaried Persons in Private Employ	36	487	2,044
C. Teachers	79	698	2,933
D. Middle-Ranking Civil Servants	139	572	2,404
E. Lower Civil Servants	67	413	1,735
All Households	852	442	1,856

*Note:* Husband's annual earnings combine principal and subsidiary earnings shown in sources.

*Sources:* US\$ figures from US Senate, Select Committee on Wages and Prices, *Cost of Living in Germany 1907 and 1908* (Washington, DC, 1910), 36; based on Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, Abteilung für Arbeiterstatistik, ed., *Erhebung von Wirtschaftsrechnungen minderbemittelter Familien im Deutschen Reiche (Reichs-Arbeitsblatt, Sonderheft 2)* (Berlin, 1909): 44–8; cf. Hohorst et al., *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch II*, 2nd ed., 112–14.

skilled—above all in Leipzig.<sup>109</sup> Further down Table 12.6, we see that whereas the average household fell about 350 Marks short of the second income threshold (2,200 Marks) for an extra ballot, teachers and middle-ranking civil servants exceeded that mark. Lower civil servants—about whose “reliability” Saxon authorities worried—fell closer to the 1,400 Mark threshold that applied to them. Table 12.7 lists many other occupations that exceeded or fell short of the 1,600 Mark threshold for a second ballot, often by a small amount. Skilled workmen in metal industries (in this sample) earned an average of 1,618 Marks annually. Blacksmiths earned 1,579 Marks. We are not the only ones who can use such evidence to calculate what types of workers might have qualified for a second or third ballot in 1909. As shown in Chapter 11, Saxon statisticians and other suffrage experts pored over the same kind of evidence. They recommended one plural ballot system over another by calculating—as best they could—which groups of voters were likely to qualify for extra ballots and, thus, might be especially dangerous to the state if they supported the SPD.

Social Democracy's chances of winning any given seat in 1909 varied enormously across the state. Yet Saxon industry was so thoroughly diffused beyond the walls of its towns and cities—let alone its *big* cities—that even “rural” Landtag constituencies offered workers a chance to overcome the unfairness of the plural ballot. Although many textile workers who lived outside Chemnitz were women and thus barred from voting, this diffusion of workers was one of Saxony's salient features:

<sup>109</sup> Annual wages for Leipzig workers in Dobson, *Authority*, Appendix 1, 299–302.

**Table 12.7.** Annual Earnings of Heads of Family in Germany, by Occupation, 1907–08

Occupation of head of family		Total families	Husband's average annual earnings	
		(no.)	(US\$)	(Marks)
1	Civil engineers, constructors	3	766.45	3,220
2	Teachers	79	698.59	2,935
3	Officials of secondary rank	129	585.03	2,458
4	Salaried persons in private firms	17	528.72	2,222
5	Molders	11	471.16	1,980
6	Printers, lithographers	10	473.61	1,990
7	Independent business men (industrial)	4	460.55	1,935
8	Machinery setters up, mounters, etc.	6	460.32	1,934
9	Commercial employees	19	448.59	1,885
10	Compositors	16	444.68	1,868
11	Subordinate officials	67	413.23	1,736
12	Locksmiths	21	398.90	1,676
13	Skilled workmen in building trades	18	390.04	1,639
14	Skilled workmen in various trades	31	392.46	1,649
15	Carpenters	20	397.83	1,672
16	Masons	41	391.26	1,644
17	Dock and wharf laborers	17	378.98	1,592
18	Skilled workmen in metal industries	21	385.02	1,618
19	Skilled workmen in machinery trades	11	376.10	1,580
20	Officials of secondary rank not permanently appointed	10	406.84	1,709
21	Gardeners	12	393.05	1,651
22	Skilled workmen in food industries	7	377.06	1,584
23	Blacksmiths	12	375.78	1,579
24	Tinsmiths	10	353.98	1,487
25	Cabinetmakers	42	359.86	1,512
26	Painters	26	362.51	1,523
27	Saddlers	11	360.39	1,514
28	Bakers and confectioners	7	383.78	1,613
29	Shipwrights, ship carpenters	10	370.51	1,557
30	Skilled workmen in woodworking	15	342.29	1,438
31	Street-railway workers	7	331.33	1,392
32	Tailors	8	329.22	1,383
33	Laborers, not specified	33	346.38	1,455
34	Textile workers	10	321.47	1,351
35	House servants, messengers	9	318.33	1,338
36	Skilled workmen in clothing trades	6	320.26	1,346
37	Unskilled industrial workmen	54	317.63	1,335
38	Coachmen, teamsters	7	298.18	1,253
39	Street laborers	13	304.99	1,281
40	Women (widows, heads of families)	2	393.34	1,653
Total		852		

*Note:* All figures converted to German Marks from US\$ at the rate (0.238) used by the source (p. 3)—or inverted as 4.2017—and then rounded to the nearest Mark. Husband's total average annual earnings calculated from average family income and percent of family income earned from husband's principal and subsidiary earnings, as shown in source data. Earnings of wives and children, earnings through subletting, in kind, or in other forms, have been omitted (except row 40). English-language occupations are verbatim with overlapping categories and/or exclusions noted in original. Occupations *not* included in row 13: masons, carpenters, painters; *not* in row 18: molders, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, locksmiths; *not* in row 19: shipwrights, machine builders; *not* in row 22: bakers; *not* in row 30: cabinetmakers; *not* in row 36: tailors.

*Source:* US Senate, Select Committee on Wages and Prices, *Cost of Living in Germany 1907 and 1908* (Bulletin 38, May 1910, United States Bureau of Labor) (Washington, DC, 1910), 38. The study was based on questionnaires circulated among families in thirty cities. It was first published by the Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, Abteilung für Arbeiterstatistik, as *Erhebung von Wirtschaftsrechnungen minderbemittelter Familien im Deutschen Reiche. Sonderheft zum Reichs-Arbeitsblatte* (Berlin, 1909). See also Table 12.6.

“Numbers of women from the surrounding towns and villages of the Erzgebirge may be seen at almost any hour of the day, with large baskets of hose slung knapsack-fashion over their shoulders, either going to, or coming from, some Chemnitz hosiery firm . . . [The goods] are on their way to some local dyeing mill . . . Indeed, it appears that the greater part of the hosiery exported from Chemnitz has been manufactured in some other town in the Erzgebirge.” Plauen, too, was characterized by “small workshops—many of them forming part of the dwelling house—scattered about in the surrounding villages.”<sup>110</sup>

## CASTING BALLOTS, CASTING STONES

It provided a first crack at the new four-class election-sham! It also allowed us to reconnoiter, for the first time, in which social strata of the population we can muster our supporters.

—report on the 1909 Landtag election, *Zentralkomitee* of the  
Saxon Social Democratic Party, 1910<sup>111</sup>

Experience shows that the most dangerous moment for a bad government is generally that in which it sets about reform.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution en France* (1856)

The sociology of Saxony's 1909 election is one of its most distinctive aspects. Social Democrats in Saxony were among the first to recognize this, as their central committee's report of 1910 testified. Voting returns allow us to reflect further on the connections between social class and political ideology.

### WHO VOTED FOR BEBEL?

What groups of people did the framers of the 1909 plural suffrage want to privilege, and what groups *did* they privilege? Which social groups were inclined to vote for the “state-supporting” parties? Would they do so come hell or high water? Conversely, which groups were so disaffected by the new suffrage, the economy, party squabbles, or other grievances that they wanted to strike a symbolic blow against the state that (they thought) had let them down? What motivation would induce them to abandon middle-of-the-road parties and opt for the extreme left? These kinds of questions have been posed for the late Weimar period. But they can illuminate an earlier period of German history too. Who voted for Hitler, who voted for Bebel? Was the electoral base of the Nazi Party or the SPD a mile wide but an inch deep? Was either one a genuine *Volkspartei*?

Table 12.8 offers initial guidance by showing the relationship between working-class voters, Social Democratic voters, and the number of ballots they cast in 1909.

<sup>110</sup> Board of Trade (Great Britain), *Cost of Living*, 140, 405.

<sup>111</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Leipzig . . . 1910*, 10.

**Table 12.8.** Working-Class Voters, SPD Voters, and SPD Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type, 1909

Constituency type (no.)	All types of voters (no.)	Working-class voters (no.)	Voters			Ballots cast for		
			All parties	Social Democracy		All parties	Social Democracy	
				(no.)	(%)		(no.)	(%)
Large cities (20)	199,538	95,122	198,275	111,139	56.1	432,427	175,035	40.5
Other urban (23)	146,169	70,570	145,323	73,346	50.5	293,236	104,360	35.6
Rural (48)	293,138	159,459	291,137	156,911	53.9	548,335	213,127	38.9
Total (91)	638,845	325,151	634,735	341,396	53.8	1,273,998	492,522	38.7

*Sources:* ZSSL 1909 (1909): 227f.; col. 2, all ballots; col. 4, valid ballots; *ibid.* (1912): 316; cf. Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 90–5.

The Landtag voting returns are differentiated according to Saxony's three types of constituencies (big-city, other urban, and rural).

We are already familiar with the totals shown on the last line of Table 12.8. In 1909, 53.8 percent of Saxon *voters* supported Social Democracy, but only 38.7 percent of *ballots* fell to SPD candidates. The SPD's share of seats in the new Landtag was smaller still: just 27.5 percent (twenty-five of ninety-one seats). Two related points are important. First, the total number of voters who supported the SPD exceeded the total number of workers in Saxony by more than 16,000. Although not very large, this figure underscores the value of hunting for Social Democracy's fellow travelers who were not workers. Second, most of this excess was accounted for by non-workers in the large cities. Whereas about 95,000 working-class voters were found in Saxony's twenty big-city constituencies, about 111,000 votes were cast there for SPD candidates. This disparity in the big cities accounted for the entire difference statewide. In the other two types of constituencies, much smaller disparities cancelled each other out. In the "other urban" category, the number of SPD voters exceeded the number of workers by less than 3,000. In rural constituencies, the number of Social Democratic voters fell short of the number of workers by roughly the same margin. Whenever possible, one should differentiate between Social Democracy's successes in the big cities and in the seventy-one constituencies outside them.

Voting in Leipzig's seven Landtag constituencies reveals that of 37,833 ballots cast for SPD candidates, only 33,291 were cast by workers, leaving a differential of 4,542 ballots. Given that a significant number of workers did not vote the party line and supported a non-socialist candidate instead, up to one-quarter of all SPD ballots in Leipzig may have been cast by voters who did not belong to the working classes.<sup>112</sup> To be sure, the SPD did not make the transition from a class-based party to a *Volkspartei* before 1914. However, the evidence suggests that SPD supporters included many burghers who disagreed with the authoritarian state's exclusionary practices against the "party of revolution." The latter may have remained a pariah for many other burghers and state authorities; but it was more difficult after Saxony's 1909 election than it was before to depict the SPD as a proletarian pariah.

Evidence presented in Table 12.9 returns to the question of how Saxon statisticians so badly underestimated the SPD's chances. This figure juxtaposes two predictions about the outcome of the 1909 election, with the actual result of voting on 21 October 1909. The first and second estimates were drawn up by Dr. Eugen Würzburger, director of Saxony's Royal Statistical Office, in mid-December 1908 and early January 1909—that is, just before the final suffrage bill passed both houses of the Landtag. Estimates 1 and 2 diverge significantly.

Würzburger's January 1909 estimate (Estimate 2) was so erroneous that it makes more sense to compare his December 1908 estimate (Estimate 1) with voting returns from the following October (Actual). We should give Würzburger credit for coming reasonably close with some of his predictions. Compare, for example,

<sup>112</sup> As estimated by Adam, *Arbeitsmilieu*, 301–3. Cf. LWRK, 238.



**Table 12.9.** Ballots Cast for SPD and Non-SPD Candidates, Saxony 1909: Estimated and Actual

Estimate 1						
Enfranchised electors with . . .	Est. (no.) of electors	Estimated Ballots to be Cast: Würzburger (15 December 1908)				
		Total (no.) of ballots	Non-SPD		SPD	
			(no.)	%	(no.)	%
4 ballots	36,500	146,000	129,504	88.7%	16,496	11.3%
3 ballots	88,100	264,300	230,352	87.2%	33,948	12.8%
2 ballots	248,400	496,800	280,970	56.6%	215,830	43.4%
1 ballot	382,000	382,000	141,425	37.0%	240,575	63.0%
Total	755,000	1,289,100	782,251	60.7%	506,849	39.3%
Estimate 2						
Enfranchised electors with . . .	Est. (no.) of electors	Estimated Ballots to be Cast: Würzburger (8 January 1909)				
		Total (no.) of ballots	Non-SPD		SPD	
			(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
4 ballots	104,323	417,292	402,447	96.4%	14,845	3.6%
3 ballots	62,447	187,341	172,627	92.1%	14,714	7.9%
2 ballots	195,435	390,870	263,511	67.4%	127,359	32.6%
1 ballot	392,937	392,937	70,729	18.0%	322,208	82.0%
Total	755,142	1,388,440	909,314	65.5%	479,126	34.5%
Actual						
Voters with . . .	Total (no.) of voters	Actual Ballots Cast (21 October 1909)				
		Total (no.) of ballots	Non-SPD		SPD	
			(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
4 ballots	118,914	475,656	436,360	91.7%	39,296	8.3%
3 ballots	56,490	169,470	124,626	73.5%	44,844	26.5%
2 ballots	169,541	339,082	155,566	45.9%	183,516	54.1%
1 ballot	289,790	289,790	64,924	22.4%	224,866	77.6%
Total	634,735	1,273,998	781,476	61.3%	492,522	38.7%

*Notes:* “Actual” figures represent ballots cast—including “other” (*zersplittert*) but not “invalid” (*ungültig*)—only in the main election (first ballot) on 21 October 1909.

*Sources:* Eugen Würzburger, Direktor, Königliches Sächsisches Statistisches Landesamt, to MdI, 15 Dec. 1908 and 8 Jan. 1909 (Anlage), SHStAD, MdI 5491; *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 228. Some figures calculated by the author.

estimated and actual proportions of SPD electors among those casting either one or four ballots. The December 1908 estimate was in the right ballpark. Conversely, when we look to SPD supporters among electors with two or three ballots—highlighted with boxes in column 7—we see that Würzburger's calculations were badly off the mark. In his better (December) estimate, Würzburger predicted that among two- and three-ballot electors, 43.4 percent and 12.8 percent of the ballots they cast would fall to the Social Democrats. In October 1909 the actual percentages among these two groups of voters were much higher. Well over half of all ballots cast by two-ballot electors fell to the SPD. Over one-quarter of those cast by three-ballot voters also went to Social Democratic candidates.

Figure 12.2 provides a different overview of how each party fared among voters eligible to cast single or multiple ballots. Again four groups of constituencies are presented in order to illustrate differences among A. big cities, B. other towns and cities, C. the countryside, and D. all of Saxony. A high proportion of one-ballot voters supported Social Democracy and a high proportion of four-ballot voters supported National Liberals or Conservatives. Two other salient features of the 1909 election are revealed in Figure 12.2 (marked with arrows). First, the SPD won significant support among voters who cast two ballots. This was true in all three types of constituency. Second, Conservatives won a high proportion—over 60 percent—of four-ballot voters in rural constituencies. As a result, although Social Democratic voters outnumbered Conservative voters in the countryside by two to one, both parties won approximately the same number of ballots (about 210,000) in those “rural” constituencies.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, roughly equal numbers of ballots did not translate into equal numbers of seats. Conservatives won twenty-four of those constituencies, Social Democrats only sixteen.

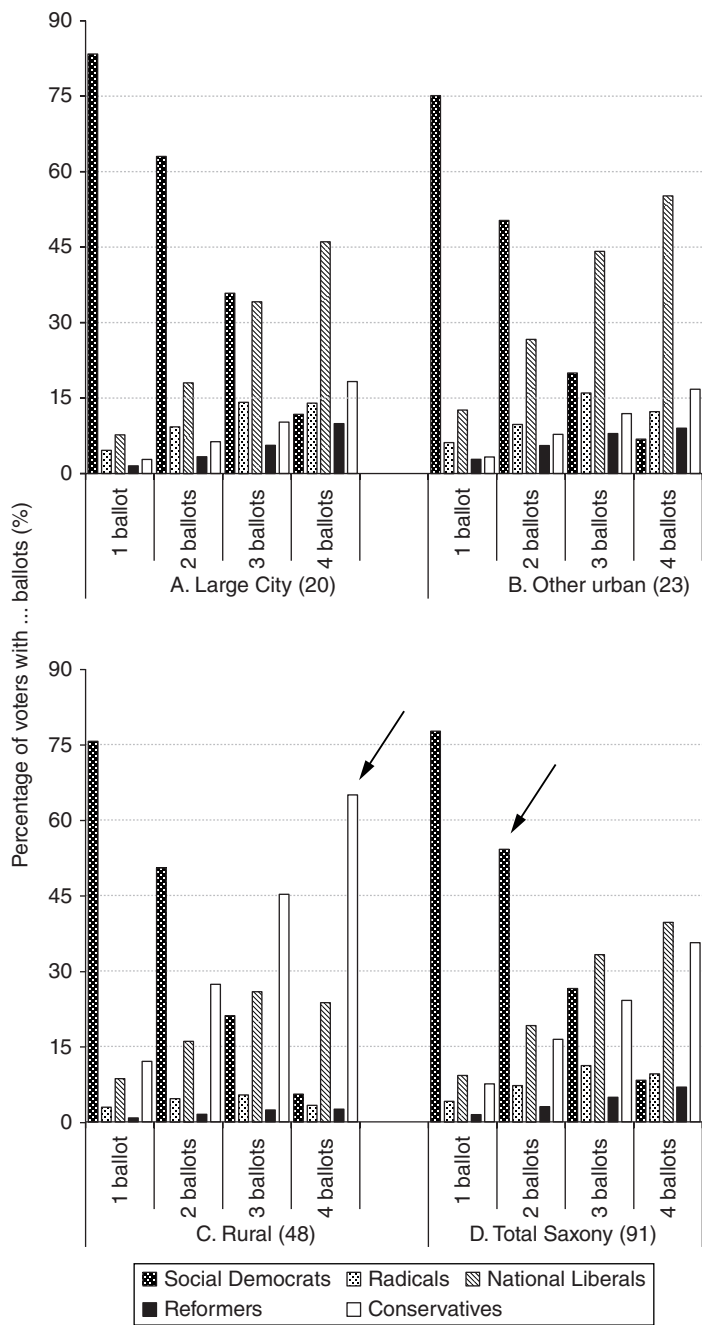
Among Saxony's twenty big-city constituencies, the SPD won seven of them: two in Dresden, three in Leipzig, two in Chemnitz. In the two big cities with just one constituency apiece, the left liberals dominated: Michael Bär in Zwickau and Oskar Günther in Plauen. In Saxony's twenty-three “other urban” constituencies, the SPD won in only two of them: Bebel's and Liebknecht's old stomping grounds of Glauchau and Stollberg.<sup>114</sup> Otherwise, as noted already, National Liberals and Radicals dominated this category. What may surprise readers particularly, given what has been said about Social Democratic strength in the big cities, is that SPD candidates won the rest of their seats—sixteen of twenty-five—in “rural” constituencies. These victories were concentrated in the densely-populated, industrialized region between Chemnitz and Plauen.<sup>115</sup> That they also won in the newly-created 46th and 47th rural constituencies demonstrates that even Georg Heink's gerrymandering could not overcome the Social Democratic tide.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Within about 3,000 ballots either way.

<sup>114</sup> The 15th and 17th “other urban” constituencies.

<sup>115</sup> The 1st, 2nd, 6th, 10th, 14th, 16th, 30th, 31st, 36th, 37th, 38th, 40th, 42nd, 43rd rural constituencies.

<sup>116</sup> Besides the analysis in *ZSSL 1909*, an overview is found in Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 145–9. See SLTW, 195–211 for lists of all LT deputies and the constituencies they won, 1869–1918.



**Figure 12.2.** Landtag Voters and Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type and Party, Saxony 1909. Note the relatively high proportions of Conservative voters with four ballots (especially in rural constituencies) and Social Democratic voters with two ballots (throughout Saxony).

Source: Drawn from data in *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 228.

The Saxon Statistical Office published the first of four studies of Landtag voting in the first week of February 1910 (see Table 12.10).<sup>117</sup>

This publication confirmed the “highly surprising fact”<sup>118</sup> that even under the plural voting system, Social Democrats had broad support among the electorate. If we consider category D, all Saxon constituencies, we see that the SPD won the allegiance of 77.6 percent of one-ballot voters, over half of two-ballot voters, over one-quarter of three-ballot voters, and 8.3 percent of four-ballot voters. It was all those two- and three-ballot SPD voters that set Saxon public opinion alight. Were they all “enemies of the established social and political order”?

Certainly not. Nevertheless, the prospects for social stability and good governance began to wobble, especially for contemporaries who considered hypothetical election outcomes if the voting rules had been different in 1909. (They were discussed by Social Democrats at their party congress in 1910.)<sup>119</sup> If Saxony had not had a plural ballot system, and if a victor had been proclaimed if he secured an absolute majority of ballots cast—as in Reichstag elections—the Social Democrats would have won fifty-four Landtag seats on the first ballot and would have participated in thirty-two run-off ballots. If, however, a relative majority had sufficed to declare a victor, then Social Democrats would have won eighty of ninety-one Landtag seats. Such conjecture is subject to the same dangers—and there are many—that beset all variations of “what if” history.<sup>120</sup> The anti-socialist “parties of order,” without doubt, would have concluded more first-ballot alliances under such a system than they actually did in October 1909. Yet, these hypotheticals are not idle musing. They demonstrate that the enemies of Social Democracy were correct in their assumption that the relatively liberal suffrage of 1868, with only a tax threshold, would eventually have resulted in Social Democrats winning a majority of seats in the Landtag. That premise had been manipulated and exploited by Paul Mehnert in 1895–96. But it was not false.

When the run-offs resulted in an SPD caucus of twenty-five deputies, every non-socialist party blamed the other for the SPD’s victory.<sup>121</sup> Conservatives reminded Saxon burghers that all Landtag deputies who voted for the suffrage reform in January 1909 had expected “about 14 to 18 Social Democrats” to enter the Landtag when the next elections were held. (As we have seen, most predicted only fifteen SPD seats.) The Social Democrats’ success, according to the Conservatives, was not due to any popular dissatisfaction with the new suffrage but rather other factors. These included the “fact” that every other party had singled out Conservatives as scapegoats for Bülow’s fall, that new taxes were unpopular, and that too many

<sup>117</sup> *ZSSL 1909* (1909): 228–43.

<sup>118</sup> As reported in Fürstenberg, 9.2.10, HHStAV, PAV/54. Cf. *NLVB*, 15.2.10, p. 36, noting that if the RT suffrage had prevailed, sixty-eight of ninety-one deputies would have been Social Democrats.

<sup>119</sup> SPD Sachsens, *Protokoll . . . Leipzig . . . 1910*, 12; RWA, 168; *SParl*, 69; SLTW, 65; Rudolf, *Sozialdemokratie*, 60.

<sup>120</sup> See most recently Evans, *Altered Pasts*, assessing previous literature in this vein.

<sup>121</sup> See the figure listing Landtag deputies elected, by constituency, in 1909, including their party affiliation and that of their run-off opponent, in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

**Table 12.10.** Landtag Voters and Ballots Cast, by Constituency Type and Party, Saxony 1909

**A. Large City Constituencies (20)**

Party	Total voters (no.)	Voters with . . . ballots				Total ballots (no.)	Total voters (%)	Voters with . . . ballots				Total ballots (%)	Seats Won (no.)
		1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)			1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)		
Conservatives *	16,157	2,209	3,214	2,209	8,525	49,364	8.2	2.8	6.3	10.2	18.3	11.4	0
Reformers **	8,739	1,213	1,687	1,213	4,626	26,730	4.4	1.5	3.3	5.6	9.9	6.2	1
National Liberals	44,132	6,098	9,161	7,376	21,497	132,536	22.3	7.7	18.0	34.1	46.0	30.7	9
Radicals	17,945	3,637	4,718	3,062	6,528	48,371	9.1	4.6	9.3	14.2	14.0	11.2	3
Social Democrats	111,139	65,942	31,977	7,741	5,479	175,035	55.1	83.3	63.0	35.8	11.7	40.5	7

**B. Other Urban Constituencies (23)**

Party	Total voters (no.)	Voters with . . . ballots				Total ballots (no.)	Total voters (%)	Voters with . . . ballots				Total ballots (%)	Seats Won (no.)
		1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)			1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)		
Conservatives *	11,368	2,136	3,135	1,551	4,546	31,243	7.8	3.3	7.8	11.9	16.7	10.7	4
Reformers **	7,554	1,830	2,244	1,034	2,446	19,204	5.2	2.8	5.6	7.9	9.0	6.6	0
National Liberals	39,615	8,165	10,731	5,744	14,975	106,759	27.3	12.6	26.6	44.1	55.1	36.4	14
Radicals	13,337	3,997	3,924	2,084	3,332	31,425	9.2	6.2	9.7	16.0	12.3	10.7	3
Social Democrats	73,346	48,640	20,251	2,602	1,853	104,360	50.5	75.1	50.2	20.0	6.8	35.6	18

### C. Rural Constituencies (48)

Party	Voters with . . . ballots						Voters with . . . ballots						Seats Won
	Total voters (no.)	1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)	Total ballots (no.)	Total voters (%)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	Total ballots (%)	
Conservatives *	78,028	17,539	21,418	9,857	29,214	206,802	26.8	12.0	27.3	45.1	64.9	37.7	24
Reformers **	3,956	1,133	1,171	515	1,137	9,568	1.4	0.8	1.5	2.4	2.5	1.7	1
National Liberals	41,410	12,529	12,580	5,647	10,654	97,246	14.2	8.6	16.0	20.9	23.7	17.7	5
Radicals	10,575	4,275	3,647	1,173	1,480	21,008	3.6	2.9	4.7	5.4	3.3	3.8	2
Social Democrats	156,911	110,284	39,530	4,605	2,492	213,127	53.9	75.6	50.4	21.1	5.5	38.9	2

### D. Total: All Saxon Constituencies (91)

Party	Voters with . . . ballots						Voters with . . . ballots						Seats Won
	Total voters (no.)	1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)	Total ballots (no.)	Total voters (%)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	Total ballots (%)	
Conservatives *	105,553	21,884	27,767	13,617	42,285	287,409	16.6	7.6	16.4	24.1	35.6	22.6	28
Reformers **	20,249	4,176	5,102	2,762	8,209	55,502	3.2	1.4	3.0	4.9	6.9	4.4	2
National Liberals	125,157	26,792	32,472	18,767	47,126	336,541	19.7	9.3	19.2	33.2	39.6	26.4	28
Radicals	41,857	11,909	12,289	6,319	11,340	100,804	6.6	4.1	7.3	11.2	9.5	7.9	8
Social Democrats	341,396	224,866	91,758	14,948	9,824	492,522	53.8	77.6	54.1	26.5	8.3	38.7	25

*Notes:* \* “Conservatives” include candidates of the German Cons. Party (DKP), Free Cons. Party (FKP), and most Agrarian Leaguers (BdL). \*\* “Reformers” include not only official candidates of the Reform Party but other antisemites, some BdL, and the Saxon *Mittelstand* Union (SMVgg). It was later discovered that votes cast for four Ref/SMVgg candidates (all in Leipzig) were mistakenly included in the Conservative totals. The no. of voters and no. of ballots cast for the Cons. should be reduced by 7,156 and 21,665, respectively, and added to those of the Reform Party. *ZSSLA* 57 (1911): 1. The original totals (1909) are presented here. “Voters” are those who actually cast valid ballots, not all enfranchised voters. In the rural constituency of 18: Meißen, ballots cast for the later “guest” of the Cons. caucus (the antisemite Max Schreiber, who was regarded as a BdL/SMVgg candidate) are included under Ref. here. Invalid (*ungültig*) and “other” (*zersplittert*) voters and ballots have been disregarded; hence percentages do not add up to 100. Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

*Source:* *ZSSL* 1909 (1909): 228. Cf. *SParl*, 198, with typographical errors; Ritter, “Wahlen,” 90–1.

“unpatriotic” voters had cast a protest vote without properly realizing the consequences of doing so.<sup>122</sup> Otherwise most observers focused on the Social Democrats’ strong showing among voters entitled to cast two, three, or even four ballots.

Those with a broader perspective noted that the Saxon SPD’s victories in 1909 increased the number of socialist deputies in Germany’s subnational parliaments from 140 to 186.<sup>123</sup> These were spread across nineteen Landtage and other parliaments. Bavaria had twenty-one Social Democrats, Hamburg and Baden had twenty each, Bremen and Württemberg had sixteen each, Lübeck had twelve. No state had as many as Saxony.

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The single most important factor contributing to a Social Democratic victory in 1909 was the proportion of workers among the enfranchised population. This strong correlation was first noted by Gerhard A. Ritter around the time (1991) that Jürgen Falter, a political scientist, was proving that the most important variable determining the Nazis’ electoral success was the percentage of working-class voters in any given constituency.<sup>124</sup> To the question “Who voted for Hitler?” Falter provided the emphatic answer: “Not workers!” The same correlation characterized Saxony in 1909.

When we correlate the proportion of working-class voters with the proportion of Social Democratic voters in each Landtag constituency, the relationship is close to 1:1 (100 percent). In the big cities the correlation was most positive at 0.94. In Figure 12.3, this correlation is shown graphically: the black and the striped bars display the same overall pattern (long bars at the top of the chart, shorter bars at the bottom). Just as the percentage of working-class voters (among all voters) declined from a high of about 70 percent in Leipzig VII to a low of about 35 percent in Dresden II, so too the percentage of SPD voters declined between these highs and lows. The same approximate pattern can be discerned in Figure 12.4, charting “other urban” constituencies.<sup>125</sup> The highest percentages of working-class voters and SPD voters were found in the “other urban” constituency of 14: Meerane, at the top of the chart, and the lowest were in 1: Zittau, at the bottom. In Saxony’s big cities, if the proportion of workers among voters increased by 1 percent, the proportion of voters who supported Social Democracy increased by almost 1 percent.<sup>126</sup> The correlation is also very high in the “other urban” and “rural” constituencies too (0.86 and 0.85, respectively).<sup>127</sup> For the entire kingdom, this

<sup>122</sup> *Vaterl*, 15.11.09.

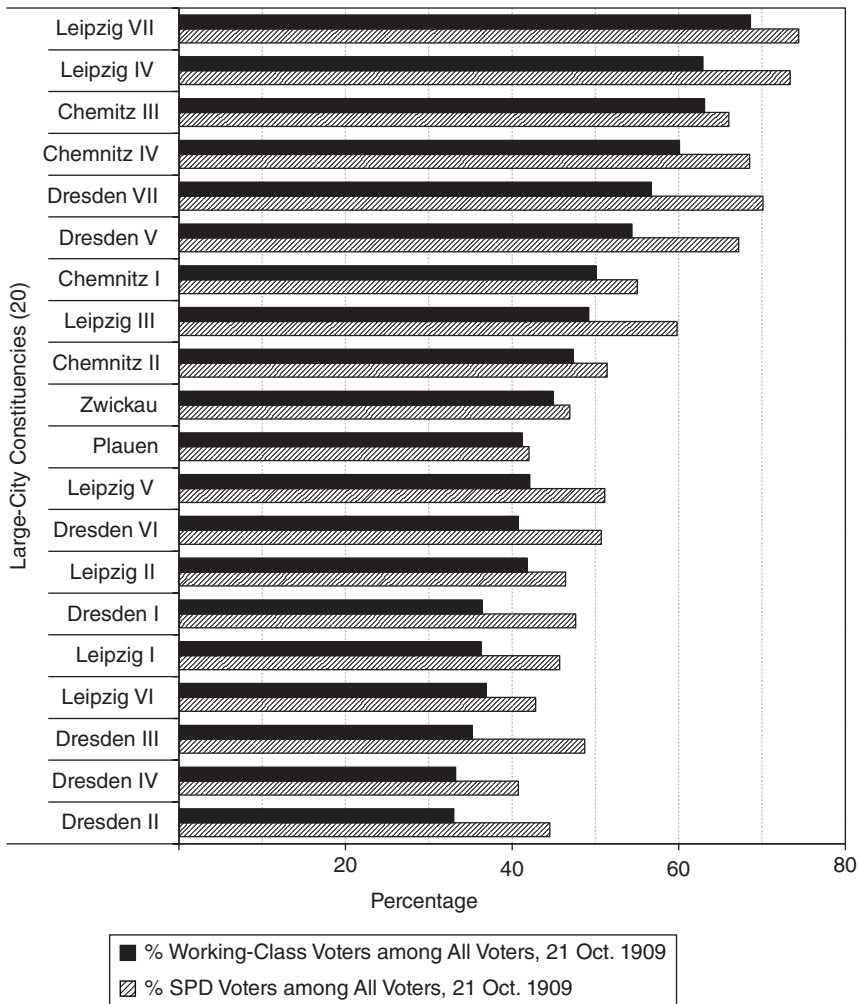
<sup>123</sup> Also: Saxe-Meiningen 9, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha 8, Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt and Saxe-Altenburg 7 each, Prussia 6, Hessen 5, Oldenburg and Saxe-Weimar 5 each, Reuß j.L 3, and Schaumburg-Lippe, Lippe, and Anhalt 1 each. SPD, *Protokolle... Magdeburg... 1910*, 39.

<sup>124</sup> Ritter, “Wahlrecht” (1990); Falter; *Hitlers Wähler*; Falter/Hanisch, “Anfälligkeit.”

<sup>125</sup> Only for practical reasons has a similar figure for Saxony’s forty-eight rural WKe been left aside: those WKe show the same correlation.

<sup>126</sup> These calculations are from Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” 96.

<sup>127</sup> The forty-eight rural constituencies were too numerous to show. See Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.



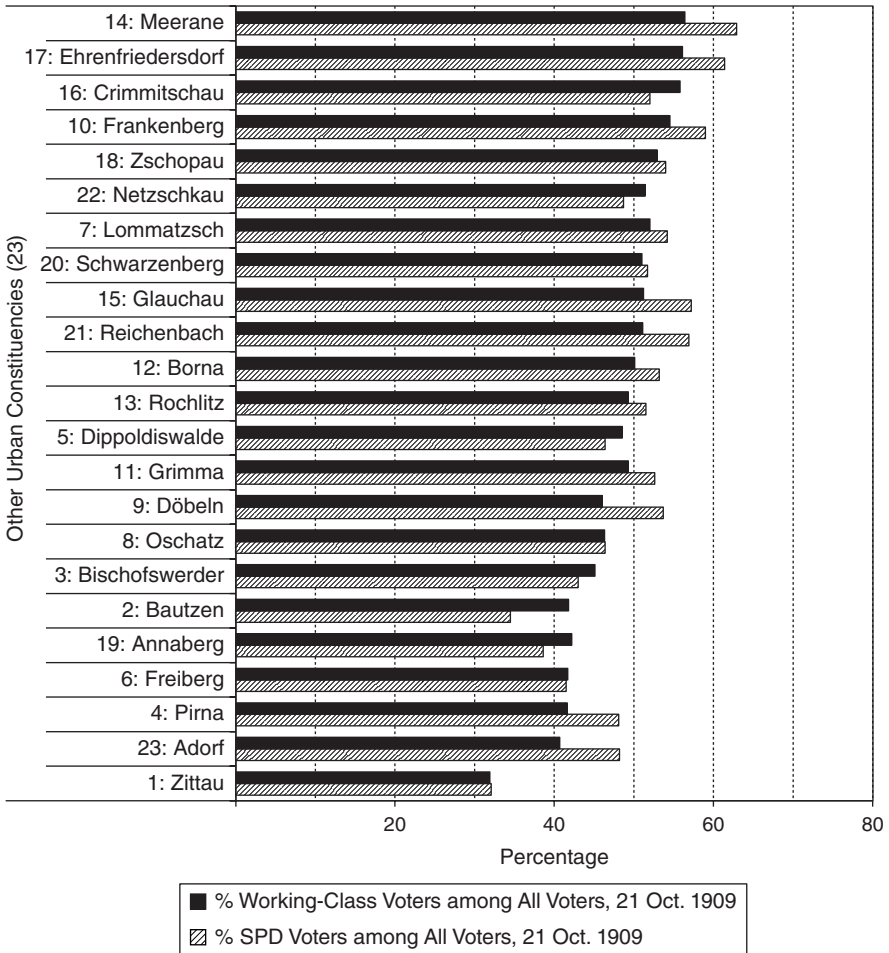
**Figure 12.3.** Working-class Voters and SPD Voters in Twenty Large City Constituencies, Saxony 1909.

Sources: Drawn from data in Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 98–101 (Table 17), which in turn is based on *ZSSL 1909*; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 40 (1912): 274f.; and Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 145–9.

variable—the proportion of working-class voters—was the most important determinant of a Social Democratic victory or loss in the 1909 elections.

Some readers would expect the SPD to have been even more dominant in Saxony's big cities. But important factors put an upper limit on socialist success there. These included the relatively high proportion of civil servants, independent businessmen, and middle-class retirees, who tended to support the non-socialist parties. To overcome such demographic challenges, the SPD had been trying since the turn of the century to make inroads among "intellectual workers" (*Kopfarbeiter*).





**Figure 12.4.** Working-class Voters and SPD Voters in Twenty-Three Other Urban Constituencies, Saxony 1909.

Sources: Drawn from data in Ritter, "Wahlrecht," 98–101 (Table 17), which in turn is based on *ZSSL 1909*; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Königreich Sachsen* 40 (1912): 274f.; and Schrörs, *Handbuch*, 145–9.

Its potential success provided the government and the "parties of order" with good reason to shape the plural suffrage in such a way that not *all* salaried employees and civil servants—as originally envisioned—would receive an extra ballot. Low-paid teachers were one group that were understood as swing voters and therefore targeted by the SPD. Leipzig's regional governor noted that teachers "not infrequently appeared as speakers in Social Democratic meetings." Sometimes they joined a local left-liberal party organization only to avoid recrimination.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Ritter, "Wahlen," 80, and Nonn, "Hintergründe," 387–90, for this and the following. See also LWRK, 237–40, and Ritter/Tenfelde, *Arbeiter*, 407–8, 453.

Lastly, many unskilled workers in the large cities proved to be “tough nuts to crack” for the SPD. They might have recently migrated—either from the countryside or another locality—and not yet be integrated into a Social Democratic milieu. It didn’t help that such workers were disparaged by Social Democratic functionaries as belonging to the *Lumpenproletariat*. Many were itinerant or unmotivated. Others “snipped a little” off the municipal and state taxes they paid each year. The result? Such “*Lumpen*” might fail to meet the residency requirement or the tax threshold for Landtag elections, even though they were eligible to vote in Reichstag elections (which may well have satisfied their thirst for political inclusion). If they were eligible to vote at all in the Saxon Landtag election of October 1909, it was unlikely they had more than a single ballot to cast.

The Saxon case shows that urban and rural areas were becoming less distinct, *except* in the electoral system itself. The Right’s strength in rural Saxony before 1914 has its echo in the Nazi Party’s early success in the German countryside. But the trajectories on which Saxony’s and Germany’s electoral cultures were running in 1913 were deflected by the First World War, the revolution of 1918–19, the hyper-inflation of 1923, and the Great Depression. The political battlefield had been transformed so fundamentally by 1932 that the Nazis outstripped their opponents in every part of Germany, even in Saxony’s biggest cities.

#### A NEW START?

In the previous chapter, we noted that although the process of suffrage reform in Saxony demonstrated one feature of a democratic polity—“a system that allows for peaceable compromises to be made between ever-present conflicts of values and interests”—it did not reflect or introduce democratic governance or even democratic habits of mind. The same conclusion is prompted by initial reactions to the Saxon Landtag election of October 1909. It has been claimed that a government is acting “*truly* democratically” when, among other things, it “faces re-election and abides by the results.”<sup>129</sup> No government in Imperial Germany had to face re-election: at the national and state levels, government leaders and state ministries were appointed by the monarch. Even mayors were nominated by municipal councils and had to be confirmed by the state. The question of whether German governments had to abide by the results of elections is more contentious. Yes, national elections grew more important during the Imperial era as an expression of popular opinion. Chancellors Bülow and Bethmann Hollweg could not hope to govern without taking into account the alignment of parties in the Reichstag and the likelihood that majorities could be found for government legislation. The opposite viewpoint, however, deserves more emphasis.

After the 1909 Landtag election in Saxony, government leader Vitzthum and his only important colleague in the state ministry (Rüger) had no wish to “abide by the results.” The Conservative Party’s two-thirds majority in the Landtag, which had

<sup>129</sup> Both citations are from Crick, *Democracy*, 92f.

been in place as recently as 1903, had disappeared forever: Conservatives now held less than one-third of Landtag seats, with National Liberals and socialists nipping at their heels. Plural voting could not disguise the fact that every second voter had opted for "the party of revolution." But the strong showing by Social Democrats and left liberals inclined Saxon ministers to conflate the two parties and inveigh against them in sweeping broadsides, which recalled the 1880s. Even the National Liberals were now suspect. After 1909, the Saxon government continued to pursue a conservative course. It also entertained the idea of invoking a reactionary one. The "decision" of 1909 was not something to be abided; it had to be reversed.

Once the run-off elections were over, many Saxons regarded the National Liberals as the principal winners.<sup>130</sup> It may be true that of the thirty-one run-offs the National Liberals contested, they lost only seven. Yet the size of the National Liberal caucus shrank, from thirty-one members in 1907 to twenty-eight in 1909, despite their being more seats now in the Landtag. As for the Radicals, when the run-offs were over, their caucus stood at eight members: left liberals had won every run-off they contested. Given their minority position in previous Landtage and on the Suffrage Committee, the claim that they benefited most under the plural suffrage is plausible.

Plausible—but not correct. The Radical caucus after October 1909 was far smaller than the caucuses fielded by the Conservatives, National Liberals, and Social Democrats. Depending on how one counts antisemites, *Mittelständler*, late converts, and caucus "guests," the Conservatives and National Liberals stood toe to toe, with twenty-eight members each, and the SPD caucus boasted twenty-five members. It quickly became clear that the "parties of order" in the new Landtag had no intention of treating their Social Democratic colleagues as equal partners in the everyday affairs of parliamentary life. At that point the Radicals lost any chance of playing a pivotal role between Social Democrats and National Liberals, as they often did in southern Germany. Left liberals in Saxony could simply be overlooked, and frequently they were. Their reputation as genuine liberals had suffered a blow when Oskar Günther called on his party comrades to support nationalist candidates over Social Democrats. Although it was a tactical error, it was consistent with the longer history of Saxony's "closet Progressives."<sup>131</sup>

The Saxon government after 1909 continued to regard left liberalism as the thin edge of a wedge that included unreliable National Liberals. Even before the election, Vitzthum had observed that he hoped Social Democrats would win Landtag seats at the expense of liberals. Although he remarked that the Conservatives and National Liberals would have to enter the election campaign "shoulder to shoulder" against the "common enemy"—otherwise the Social Democratic "phalanx" would "rip monstrous holes in the system of the bourgeois parties"—Vitzthum preferred Conservative regiments in his army. This is how he had sized up the election campaign before it got underway: "In the first instance it will be the liberal groups that will suffer under the Social Democratic offensive. Seen from this

<sup>130</sup> See Chapter 13.

<sup>131</sup> See Hermann Fleißner, *NZ* 28 (1909/10): 237–8; Georg Gradnauer, *SM* 13 (1909): 1466ff.

perspective . . . he [Vitzthum] greeted the energetic action of the Social Democrats; he added the hope that the liberal parties, who have already shown their incapacity well enough, will find the ground crumbling under their feet more and more." "Only then," concluded Vitzthum, "could a rallying of the non-socialist parties on a broader conservative basis be carried through."<sup>132</sup>

What exactly was that "broader conservative basis"? Neither Vitzthum in Saxony nor Bethmann Hollweg in Prussia was considering a coup d'état against his Landtag. Someone else was, though—Finance Minister Rüter. He had recently been elevated to the peerage by Friedrich August III, in recognition for having kept Saxony's state debt under control for almost a decade. Rüter knew his days were numbered: the king was going to support Vitzthum as he had Hohenthal. But it was not mere grumbling that inclined Rüter to repeat almost verbatim the same willingness to consider a coup d'état that chancellors Caprivi and Hohenlohe had voiced in the 1890s. The Finance Reform crisis and the contortions it had demanded of Saxon Conservatives appalled this minister. Before the Landtag election, Rüter had been "exceptionally pessimistic about the composition of the Reichstag." He felt that "occult party affairs" had "taken hold there" and were not likely to let go. Like Vitzthum, Rüter believed that Germany's political future could be made secure, if at all, only on the basis of a less democratic parliamentary system. Having administered a bitter remedy to Saxon finances and restored them to good health by 1909, Rüter was prepared to see German democracy swallow a poison pill. To the Austrian envoy in Dresden he put it this way:

If the deplorable habits and the petty partisan interests continue to grow and suppress the great interests of the Reich, as it appears they will, then the value of a national representative body becomes completely illusory and the German parliament will have outlived its time. By and by, one will have to consider a different form of representation, perhaps the representation of [socio-economic] interests, since the present state of things can lead only to a complete breakdown of the political order.<sup>133</sup>

Just as in the 1890s, many burghers sympathized with the apocalyptic vision of a man like Rüter because Social Democrats trumpeted their success as the "beginning of the end" for the old order. Hermann Fleißner expressed his party's satisfaction at "having made amends" for 1907, having turned Saxony "red" a second time, and having "successfully wrested . . . the right to participate in the work of legislation." "Saxon Social Democracy," he wrote, had "forced this realization upon the worst reactionaries there have ever been." Saxony's political development would continue in the same direction, predicted Fleißner: either the "ruling class" would have to make concessions to the demands of the SPD or it would face opposition from ever-wider circles of the population. "One way or another, the propertied class is the prisoner of Social Democracy."<sup>134</sup>

Of course Fleißner's boast should not be taken at face value. The division between Social Democrats and "everyone else" was not as clear as he claimed. The role of the

<sup>132</sup> Fürstenberg, 28.8.09; HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>133</sup> Fürstenberg, 21.6.09; *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *NZ* 28, H. 7 (Nov. 1909): 1:234–5.

Saxon *Mittelstand* between Left and Right complicated the picture, as it would again during the Weimar Republic. Nor could it be assumed that every working-class voter had supported the “party of revolution.” Still: Social Democracy had been supported by an absolute majority of voters in two of every three Saxon constituencies.<sup>135</sup> The enemies of Social Democracy were warranted in seeing the future darkly.

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It was partly this breadth of SPD support across the kingdom, partly the “unreliability” of the liberals, that prompted Vitzthum and Rüger to become more pessimistic after the election of 1909 was over. Again Rüger was not subtle. He told the Austrian envoy that “he had never seen the need for a change of the suffrage” in the first place. As “a conservative of the old school,” Rüger believed the election result had proved “that making a reality of the slogan about admitting broad layers of society into governance had produced a deplorable fiasco.” The first session of Saxony’s plural Landtag only increased Rüger’s disgust with the suffrage reform that had created it. Near the end of the session, in February 1910, Rüger and the Conservatives were so obviously unable to make their peace with new circumstances that every envoy in Dresden commented about it. “The whole Saxon government machinery from top to bottom,” one of them wrote, is “still overwhelmingly in tune with the decades-long era of back-breaking Conservative majorities . . . Even the Conservative caucus of the Landtag still partly prefers to take on the role of the resentful, despotic, legitimate master . . . The old, very authoritarian and stock-conservative Herr von Rüger *hates* the 2nd Chamber and hardly makes any effort to hide his feelings.”<sup>136</sup>

Vitzthum was less decisive. He held on to the same mantra his predecessors had: the Saxon government was not beholden to the Conservatives or any other party. Vitzthum hoped that three roughly equal caucuses in the new Landtag would allow his government to reassert its authority. He observed off-handedly that “it will be easy . . . to tack between the non-socialist parties and make an obeisance here to the Right and there to the Left.”<sup>137</sup> Yet the new plural suffrage had been a miscalculation, in a double sense. On the one hand, Vitzthum believed “that the government had played a bad trick on itself.” Its statistical forecasts were sadly wrong. An income threshold of 1,600 Marks had “shown itself to be much too low after countless workers who had passed their 50th year were able to accumulate three ballots.” Vitzthum felt let down by statisticians and parliamentarians who had decided that such a threshold would suffice. On the other hand, Vitzthum claimed to be less worried about the twenty-five new Social Democrats than about the “lurch to the left, which *all of Saxon liberalism* seems to have taken.”<sup>138</sup> Paradoxically, Vitzthum thought reports about this leftward tendency were both mistaken

<sup>135</sup> That is, sixty-two of ninety-one.

<sup>136</sup> Montgelas, 27.2.10 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 968 (original emphasis); cf. Fürstenberg, 17.9.10, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>137</sup> For this and the following, see Fürstenberg, 5.7.09, 8.11.09, 16.11.09, 8.12.09, 9.2.10, HHStAV, PAV/54; Hohenlohe, 23.9.09, 14.11.09, 28.11.09, 2.12.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>138</sup> Emphasis added.

and “highly worrisome.” When the left-liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* celebrated the SPD’s victories in 1909 as a “lurch to the left” and the “annihilation of the Conservative Party in Saxony,” Vitzthum wrote that this was absurd—a “characteristic [liberal] appraisal of Landtag elections!” Vitzthum did not like lurches in either direction. He was rightly dismissive of the left liberals’ pipe-dream: Saxon Conservatism had not been annihilated.<sup>139</sup> Yet liberals could not be trusted.

The Austrian envoy believed this conclusion was warranted, based on left-liberal support for SPD candidates.<sup>140</sup> The Radicals had indulged in “election cattle-trading of the most dubious sort.” They had pushed only their narrow party interests, opposing Conservatives and National Liberals alike. Once the session was underway, the Austrian envoy was further convinced that the eight Radicals were “*unsichere Kantonisten*”—unreliable recruits.<sup>141</sup> He felt they would “undoubtedly vote with the party of revolution in certain situations.” This could cause great difficulty for the government, because when the Radicals did so, the Social Democrats would “hold equal weight with each of the *bürgerlich* parties.” The Prussian envoy put most of the blame on the National Liberals, who “unfortunately have recently lurched to the left.” Their election manifestos against the Conservatives were characterized by “their desperate style and content”: they were “very similar to those of the Social Democrats.”<sup>142</sup>

Apparently referring not only to Radicals but also to left-leaning National Liberals, Vitzthum noted that “the left wing of this party is very extreme in orientation, and one can fear that the antagonism between Conservatives and liberals in the chamber will be even deeper than it was before.” When Vitzthum was asked what he intended to do if the *bürgerlich* parties did not close ranks against the common foe, he shrugged his shoulders. But Vitzthum shared Finance Minister Rüger’s disrespect for parliament, for he added, “Then the whole lot of them will probably have to be sent packing.”

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To return to the question posed at the outset of this chapter: the enemies of democracy in Germany were not in the least heartened by the outcome of Saxony’s 1909 election. They sided with the “grave miscalculation” appraisal. As soon as the votes and seats were tallied and those tallies conveyed to Berlin, the Prussian state ministry quickly dropped plans to introduce a plural suffrage for its own Landtag. Saxon ministers and the Right in general took no consolation in the fact that plural voting transformed 54 percent support for the “party of revolution” into a minority of ballots (39 percent) and an even smaller proportion of Landtag seats (27 percent). For the immediate future, it might be true that political democratization was halted and Social Democrats were isolated in the Landtag. Many Saxon

<sup>139</sup> *BTbl*, 22.10.09, SHStAD, Mdl 5352.

<sup>140</sup> Fürstenberg, 8.11.09, HHStAV, PAV/54, and for the following.

<sup>141</sup> Cantonists before 1813 were men living in a recruiting district and required to serve in the Prussian army.

<sup>142</sup> Hohenlohe, 2.12.09, cited previously.

burghers nevertheless agreed with Finance Minister Rüger: the Landtag election of 1909, like Reichstag elections before 1907, reflected the impoverishment of Saxon politics, the debasement of its representative institutions, and the inability of the authoritarian state to defend itself against the threat of social democratization. Alexis de Tocqueville's observation about *anciens régimes* was correct. Suffrage reform had brought Saxony to a dangerous turning-point. The old order defended itself and survived. But the threat of democracy did not disappear.

# 13

## Adrift

Germans embraced “politics in a new key” differently in October 1909 and January 1912. But *how* differently? And differently *how*?

When we focus on antisemitism, anti-liberalism, and anti-socialism and the ways they actually operated in Saxon politics, we see historical trajectories that were congruent with those in other parts of Germany. The first years of the twentieth century had not silenced the enemies of socialism and the Jews in Germany. Some of those enemies—too many—had been emboldened by election battles from which they emerged victorious. The most important such victories were the Reichstag elections of 1907 and Saxony’s suffrage reform of 1909. Anti-democrats disagreed among themselves as to whether these events were real or potential turning points, but they hoped that a resolute policy of “no compromise” with socialism might eradicate the spectre of democracy.

In the last half-decade before the First World War, many paths still lay open for Germany’s political culture to evolve. Compared to the years before 1909, the possibility of constitutional change and the reality of political stasis under Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg seemed to foment as much opposition on the far Right as on the far Left. Pan-Germans and others soon echoed what Social Democrats had written on the occasion of Bethmann’s appointment: “The hangman still stands before our door.”<sup>1</sup>

Bethmann fooled himself by hoping that the parties of the center would “see the light,” change their tune, and cooperate with his government. After 1909, German liberals saw no value in continued compromise and self-abnegation. But a return to principled self-assertion did not yield much success either. Bethmann Hollweg in Berlin and Count Vitzthum in Dresden could not conceive of making a full break with interests and affections that bound them to conservatism. For that stance they received no thanks from the Right. Attacks from that quarter were more vicious and sweeping than any of the imperial era. They included proposals to overturn universal suffrage; to deny the vote to Jews, Social Democrats, and women; and to replace the Reichstag if it continued to mirror Germany’s social democratization.

<sup>1</sup> NZ 27, H. 43 (1908–09), 2:564 (23.6.09).



## A LOST HALF-DECADE

[Count Vitzthum] championed throne and altar courageously; but for the new era and its demands he had little understanding. Of the big cities of the land, with their mayors who were always striding forwards, he would gladly have forced them to a slower pace. It was obvious that such a minister . . . faced heavy going in the second chamber of the Landtag, where the opposition kept rising despite a cunning suffrage with plural ballots for those with property and advanced years. At that time [November 1909], if the minister had not been completely independent of any majority in the Landtag, Vitzthum would likely have been forced to resign immediately after the first sittings.

—Walter Koch, Saxon minister of the interior,  
October–November 1918<sup>2</sup>

procrastination is the  
art of keeping  
up with yesterday.

—Don Marquis, American poet and journalist<sup>3</sup>

When the Saxon Landtag's legislative session of 1909/10 opened, the British envoy in Dresden, Arthur (A.C.) Grant Duff, reported that Saxon parliamentary life might finally awaken from years of slumber. Recently accredited to the Wettin court, this envoy had not experienced Saxony's suffrage crises of 1905–06 and 1908–09, so he can be forgiven for getting things back to front. During the half-decade before 1914, Saxon politics became sleepier. It failed to produce the fireworks that most observers expected from the entry of twenty-five Social Democrats into the Saxon legislature. Although non-socialist newspapers saw things differently, foreign observers stationed in Dresden agreed on one thing: of all the parliamentarians and government ministers who behaved badly during the legislative sessions of 1909/10 and 1911/12, the Social Democrats were the *least* disruptive of the lot.<sup>4</sup> As for government bills, the only really important item on Vitzthum's agenda was the longstanding liberal demand for reform of the primary school system. But the rancorous debate about a *Volksschulgesetz* was a damp squib: in 1912 the government had to withdraw its bill because it did not satisfy either liberal party.<sup>5</sup> After having grabbed national headlines in 1909, Saxony fell below the political horizon of most Germans. Their focus turned initially to Bethmann Hollweg's attempt to reform Prussia's three-class suffrage in 1910.

<sup>2</sup> From his unpublished memoir, "Wie ich die Menschen und die Dinge sah"; SHStAD, NL Koch, Nr. 1, Bd. 1, MS pp. 160–1. Koch (1870–1947) served as Saxon Mdi 26.10.18–14.11.18.

<sup>3</sup> Marquis, *archy and mehitabel* (1927).

<sup>4</sup> See materials in SHStAD, MdAA 4507, 4808–9.

<sup>5</sup> Bavarian envoy Montgelas, 8.2.12, 11.12.12 (drafts), and other reports in BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 970; NZ 31, H. 22 (1912–13), 1:794–801 (28.2.13). Cf. Otto Richter, *Geschichte*; Uhlig, *Volksschule*; Gernert, *Schulvorschriften*; Poste, *Schulreform*.

## SAXONY'S PLURAL LANDTAG

Foreign envoys paid more attention to the party posturing that attended selection of the Saxon Landtag's *Präsidium* in November 1909 than they did to the rest of the legislative session.<sup>6</sup> As Vitzthum noted before parliament opened, the role of the Landtag president was going to be especially important now that the Conservative, National Liberal, and Social Democratic caucuses were so close to equal in size.

The practical work that took place behind the scenes in parliament revealed that the inclusion of a few Social Democrats had not brought "mass politics" into the heart of Saxony's parliament. Mayors, lawyers, and editors now did more of the hard work, but they had not displaced large estate owners and industrial magnates: the politics of notables remained largely intact as far as caucus life was concerned. Many years earlier, the wealthy merchant August Penzig from Meerane had complained on the floor of the Landtag that no space was provided for caucus meetings. For caucus members to talk to one another, "one has to hang out in various taverns, not always of the most attractive sort." Deputies who had "already spent five to eight hours in one of the Landtag committee rooms, where one cannot help perspiring despite the loss of humidity by too much gas [heating] or contentious negotiations," found no joy "in being forced to spend the rest of the evening in the hot, smoky air of cramped caucus quarters at a local drinking hole in order to continue the discussion."<sup>7</sup> Deputies were packed together so tightly on the benches of the Saxon Landtag that one photo montage from 1905 shows every face clearly. The scene is much more intimate than depictions of the Reichstag, which had almost 400 members. In Dresden's chamber at that time, not one socialist spoiled the picture (see Figure 13.1).<sup>8</sup>

After Saxony's new Landtag building was dedicated in 1907, partisanship did not disappear. "The deputies chose their seats on the floor of the house principally to be in the circle of their 'political friends,' deals were made among the parties' representatives in the lower chamber which prejudiced the [selection of] personnel for the Directorate, [and] the executives of the committees and divisions made the preliminary decisions about pending legislation."<sup>9</sup> This assessment mirrors Bebel's own view from 1885: "The parties are not officially represented in this house." That fiction, Bebel continued, meant that "what they [the parties] do is actually unofficial, in other words, done 'behind the curtains.'"<sup>10</sup> For this provocative comment Bebel was called to order by the Landtag's presiding president.

On 9 November 1909, the chairman of the Conservative caucus, Gottfried Opitz, took over from Paul Mehnert as president of the lower chamber for the new session's preliminary sitting. One day later he was forced to vacate that position.<sup>11</sup>

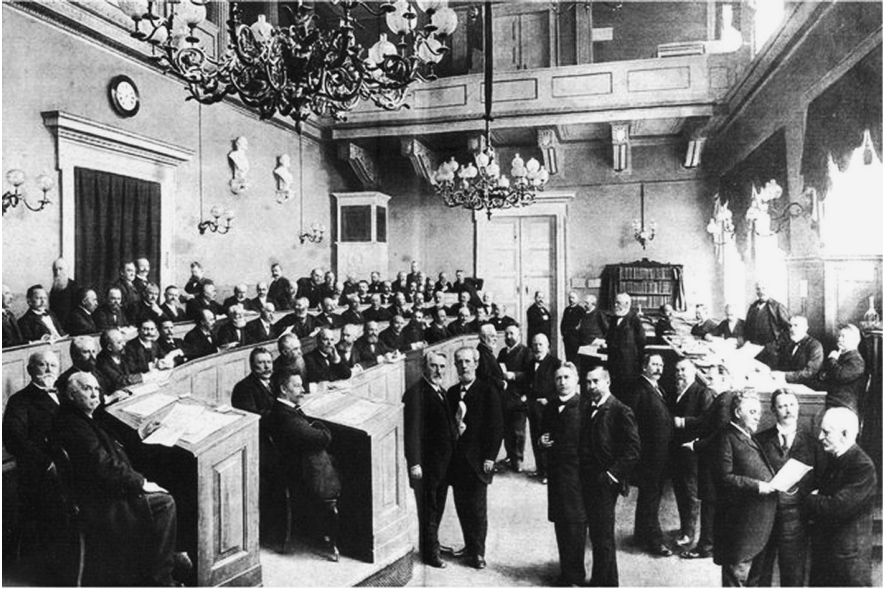
<sup>6</sup> The LT's executive, committees, divisions, and caucus executives are analyzed in *SParl*, 117–41.

<sup>7</sup> Penzig, *LTMitt* 1877/78, II.K., 1:51 (7.11.77).

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Goldstein (SPD) re-entered the II.K. only in Oct. 1905.

<sup>9</sup> *SParl*, 139–40. <sup>10</sup> Bebel, *LTMitt* 1885/86, II.K., 1:211 (18.12.85).

<sup>11</sup> For the following, Austrian envoy Fürstenberg, 16.11.09, 8.12.09, HHStAV, PA/V, 54; Montgelas, 11.11.09 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 967; Prussian envoy Hohenlohe, 14.11.09, 28.11.09, 2.12.09, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; also *SParl*, 71–3.



**Figure 13.1.** Lower Chamber of the Saxon Landtag, 1905. This montage was assembled from individual photographs: it does not accurately reflect the chamber's seating order. Paul Mehnert, president of the chamber, stands at far right in front of the windows. In autumn 1907, deputies moved into the new Landtag building designed by Paul Wallot, who also designed the Reichstag building in Berlin.

Source: *SParl*, inside covers.

The Conservatives were still arrogant enough to suggest that the presidency should be given to them, or that they and the National Liberals should toss a coin. The National Liberals would not hear of it. In a series of votes that raised eyebrows, the National Liberal Paul Vogel was elected president. No one could doubt that many Social Democrats had voted in his favor. Opitz was elected vice-president, with eighty-three votes (thus also including SPD support). But the “parties of order” arranged that the third senior position in the *Präsidium* did not go to the party with the third-most deputies, namely the SPD. Its candidate was Julius Fräßdorf. The “parties of order” demanded of Fräßdorf that he offer the usual oath of allegiance to the crown and attend official functions at court. This he refused to do. Thus the Radical Michael Bär won this third post by the slimmest possible margin—thirty-seven of seventy-two votes, with Conservatives casting white ballots in protest. When the less important positions in the directorate were filled, the Social Democrat Hermann Fleißner refused to accept the post of second secretary.<sup>12</sup>

It was understood that Social Democrats could no longer be denied membership on the Landtag's four committees. Fräßdorf even headed the most important of these, the Finance Committee. His credentials were impressive: one envoy referred

<sup>12</sup> *NZ* 28 (1909/10), 2:320–1.

to him as the “best mind” in the lower house.<sup>13</sup> This honor may have gone to Fräßdorf’s head: he was too confident that the Landtag had lurched to the left in 1909. On 30 November he told the house that “the government is now . . . freed from its self-imposed conservative patronage.” He even claimed that the government owed its new room to maneuver to the Social Democrats themselves, who would “take the good, wherever it comes from, and if the good should come from the Conservative side, the Social Democratic caucus would support it, and if the bad should perhaps come from the liberal side, Social Democracy would fight it.”<sup>14</sup> These claims were especially piquant because Fräßdorf referred to the “closet government” (*Nebenregierung*) that Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz had denounced in July 1907. And he alluded again to the clique around Paul Mehnert by referring to his landed estate, Medingen. Fräßdorf told the house that the “Medinger Hunt Club” and the Saxon Agricultural Council were “no longer in the position . . . of exerting the same influence upon the government” they once had. Now the way was open for “truly liberal politics.” To add punch to his words, Fräßdorf turned to the left liberals and promised that “we will steady your cross and, if necessary, stiffen your knee.”

The fourteen reform motions tabled as soon as the Landtag opened remind us that democratization was not understood at the time as something that had been laid to rest by the Saxon suffrage reform of 1909. One motion demanded the prompt publication of detailed statistical returns from the Landtag election; one demanded an ordinary session of the Landtag every year, not every two years; one demanded introduction of the general, equal, direct, and secret suffrage for all Saxon citizens, male and female, over the age of twenty-one, with proportional representation; and three motions demanded abolition or reform of Saxony’s upper chamber.

By February 1910, when debate on the fate of the upper chamber came to the floor of the lower house, foreign observers emphasized the “little incidents,” “misunderstandings,” “hurt feelings,” “personal ambitions,” and other “imponderables” that were tarnishing the Landtag’s reputation.<sup>15</sup> The Social Democrats were “looking on with pleasure and philosophical calm as the government and the Right argue[d] with the National Liberals, dispensing rebukes and applause to the combatants ‘without prejudice’ while assuming an Olympian countenance.” The National Liberals had entered the session “triumphantly” after their election “victory,” but the “government machinery [was] still oriented to many years of Conservative dominance and often [could] not deal with the new situation.”

According to two well-informed insiders, reactionaries on the right wing of the Saxon Conservative Party were planning a coup d’état.<sup>16</sup> These die-hards believed the SPD was using demagogic tactics “to win the trust of a certain class of irresolute

<sup>13</sup> Montgelas, 10.7.12 (draft), BHStAM, Ges. Dresden 970.

<sup>14</sup> For this and the following, *LTMit* 1909/10, II.K., 1:225 (30.11.09).

<sup>15</sup> For this and the following, Hohenlohe, 18/25.2.10, 25.4.10, 14/27.5.10, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; Montgelas, 27.2.10, 27.7.10 (drafts), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 968.

<sup>16</sup> For the following, Fürstenberg, 9.2.10, 28.5.10, HHStAV, PAV/54, and *LNN*, 9.2.10; Montgelas, 27.2.10 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 968.

*bürgerlich* voters.” While appearing as moderate as possible on the floor of the Landtag, Social Democrats were sending their “red emissaries” into the countryside and “distributing thousands of incendiary brochures.” Worst of all, they were permitted to do so while basking in the “excessive tolerance of the government.” Fed up with the plural Landtag after just three months, these Conservatives planned to use “any available opportunity to provoke a serious incident” and thereby drive the Radicals and left-wing National Liberals “into the arms of the socialists.” If this situation were “exploited cleverly” by the Conservatives, reported the Austrian envoy, it would “first demonstrate the unworkability of the house and then be followed by a dissolution.” After that the presumed next step was the imposition<sup>17</sup> of a revised suffrage law on the Landtag.

This plan bore a strong resemblance to similar ones floated in the mid-1890s: an influx of Social Democrats into parliament—whether the Reichstag or a state Landtag—was to be used as an excuse to declare parliament unworkable, send its deputies home, and revise the existing suffrage. In the 1890s, such coup d’état plans foundered on the vacillating Kaiser and others. In Saxony in 1910, they foundered on the opposition of Friedrich August III and Count Vitzthum. The king believed that a “unilateral revision of the suffrage would yield only worse results.” But neither he nor his ministers had embraced the 1909 suffrage reform or the parliament it produced. Nor is there any evidence that those arch-Conservatives were censured for their reactionary intrigues. On the contrary: Finance Minister Rüger almost certainly knew about this attack “and would have done everything possible to support it.”<sup>18</sup> The rest of the parliamentary session, and the next one, would prove that the fate of Saxony’s plural Landtag still lay in doubt.

The possibility of Conservatives jumping back into the driver’s seat seemed all the more plausible in 1910 because Saxon National Liberals were riven by internal party strife. Paul Vogel represented the old guard; but he was described as a man without character, without authority, without courage.<sup>19</sup> During the session the more left-leaning deputies who had once followed Gustav Stresemann’s lead—Max Langhammer and Robert Merkel, most notably—had gained the upper hand in the Landtag caucus, challenging the authority of the nominal caucus chairman Franz Hettner. Under the influence of this left wing, the National Liberals sought common ground with the two parties to their left on the issue of reforming the upper house. But no such common ground existed.

The National Liberals were determined to see industrialists and other businessmen represented in greater numbers in the upper house. This was essentially the same reform proposal they had advanced under Stresemann’s leadership in 1905 and which had yielded only a paltry reform in 1906. Now they also demanded the representation of other professional groups, including lawyers, physicians, educators, and engineers.<sup>20</sup> According to a motion they introduced in late November 1909, industry “now paid 75 per cent of Saxony’s direct taxes, while the owners of

<sup>17</sup> “Aufkotroyierung.”

<sup>18</sup> Hohenlohe, 27.10.09, cited previously.

<sup>19</sup> Montgelas, 27.7.10 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 968.

<sup>20</sup> The terms were *Rechtspflege*, *Heilkunde*, *Unterrichtswesen*, *technische Wissenschaft*.

the 900 landed estates only paid 2 or 3 per cent." How was it, the National Liberals asked, that industry was represented in the upper chamber by only five members whereas landowners and agrarians were represented by twenty-seven?<sup>21</sup> To refute the criticism that they wanted an upper house that represented only economic interests, not the general good, the National Liberals claimed that such new representatives should be regarded "as expert advisors of the administration rather than as delegates of particular groups or classes."

The left-liberal Radicals wanted major reforms of the upper house too, though they emphatically denied that they wanted to abolish it. The motion introduced by Oskar Günther advocated a return to the law of 15 November 1848, "according to which the Upper House was to consist of the princes of the royal house . . . and fifty other members elected by the people."<sup>22</sup> One of Günther's fellow Radicals, Alfred Brodauf, declared "that no reform of the upper house would be acceptable which did not provide for the introduction of representatives of labor." This was a transparent attempt to steal the Social Democrats' thunder. To no avail. The Social Democrats wanted the upper house abolished outright as a "medieval" relic and "entirely inconsistent with the interests of democracy and the dictates of common sense."<sup>23</sup> To this Vitzthum replied curtly that he would not take up the SPD motion "as it was of course irreconcilably opposed to the existing constitution." Conservative speakers were also haughty and unyielding: one of them claimed the liberals foresaw members of the upper house multiplying "like rabbits."

The National Liberals also wanted new members representing occupational groups to be *elected* to the upper house, not named by the king as they had been for almost a century. Vitzthum's government swept aside this National Liberal "demand" with a predictable reply: it was not "opportune" to consider such a significant reform of the upper house so soon after the lower house's suffrage had been radically revised. Conservatives claimed that the National Liberals, by proposing an upper house composed of members who represented particular occupations with an imperative mandate, had sinned in three ways: They had reverted to an estate-bound conception of parliamentary representation. They had undermined the representative nature of the lower house. And they risked parliament's inundation by Social Democrats. One Conservative declared this process would end in a *Kladderadatsch*—catastrophe.

Saxony's "plural Landtag" was hamstrung by "no real cause for conflict." Instead it suffered the effects of "misunderstandings, hard feelings, squabbles, personal affronts, and ambition." The "sense of an approaching storm" that the Prussian and Austrian envoys reported in late February and early March 1910 thundered in the press, where "explosions of anger" appeared frequently. "The daily newspapers

<sup>21</sup> Hohenlohe, 28.11.09, 2.12.09, 18/25.2.10, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8 (and for reports through June 1911). Voluminous materials on reform of the upper chamber are found in SHStAD, Mdl 5476–8.

<sup>22</sup> For parts of the following, A. C. Grant Duff to British FO, 20.2.10, 6.3.10, BFO-CP, FO 371/904, reel 31, nos. 9732 and 7848, sending Merkel's (translated) article from the *LNN*, 5.3.10 and for the reference to rabbits. Cf. Grant Duff, 26.2.10 (draft), PRO, FO 215/57.

<sup>23</sup> *LTMit* 1909/10, II.K., 2:1264–1331 (17.2.10), esp. Günther, 1264ff., Fleißner, 1277ff.

publish crisis articles and paint rumors according to which either the ministry's or the chamber's days are numbered."<sup>24</sup> This mood had dissipated somewhat when the Landtag closed its doors on 13 May 1910, "not to open them again" until the autumn of 1911. (Before reform of Britain's House of Lords was decided, someone in the British Foreign Office noted that Saxon politics bore "a curious resemblance to the situation here.") After the session was over, however, speculation continued about whether the National Liberals would drift further to the left and find ways to cooperate with the Social Democrats, perhaps even in a grand bloc, as in Baden: "the distance between *Young* Liberals and Old Conservatives is . . . too large to be able to be bridged easily."<sup>25</sup> Just as worrying was the combined effect of dissonance between Conservatives and National Liberals, the Radicals' role as *Helfershelfer*, and the SPD's successful "fishing for votes" with their good behavior. That effect would be felt in the next Reichstag elections. Predictions arose in April 1910 that Social Democrats might win nineteen of twenty-three Saxon constituencies.<sup>26</sup> That is precisely what happened: in January 1912 the SPD won all but four Saxon seats.

\*

After 1909, Conservative and National Liberal caucus leaders in the Saxon Landtag were forced to abandon some of their *Herr-im-Haus* attitude in the lower chamber. The "reds" could not be ignored. Nevertheless, until October 1918 the "parties of order" blocked any comprehensive changes to the forms and functions of Saxony's parliamentary life. The Austrian envoy put it this way when the first session ended in May 1910, though he could have written the same thing in 1914: "The last Landtag has worked no better but also no worse than its predecessors—a fact that was not generally expected by public opinion in Saxony with regard to the novelty of twenty-five socialists sitting in the Landtag chamber."<sup>27</sup> In the same report he emphasized how SPD deputies had slowed down the day-to-day functioning of parliament with their long and boring speeches, with their contradictory principles and practice, and with their efforts "to deceive and draw over to their camp wavering elements among the *bürgerlich* parties." Worst of all, the presence of twenty-five Social Democrats had failed to bring the Conservatives and National Liberals closer together. The harm inflicted by the Finance Reform and the breakup of the Bülow Bloc "has not made the *bürgerlich* parties any smarter, at least not yet!" The Radicals and the left-wing National Liberals had disgraced themselves with "the licentiousness of their language" and their "choleric temperament," while the extreme right-wing Conservatives had failed in their attempt to "blast apart" the Landtag itself.

Even Vitzthum and Rüger had failed the test of good statesmanship. Vitzthum had planned to silence criticism from the lower house by having the king dismiss his finance minister—"the excitable old man" (Rüger) could "hardly count on a single

<sup>24</sup> Hohenlohe, 25.2.10, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8; Fürstenberg, 2.3.10, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>25</sup> Hohenlohe, 25.4.10 (original emphasis), PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Hohenlohe, 25.4.10, 27.5.10, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Fürstenberg, 28.5.10, HHStAV, PAV/54, and for the following.

friend among his ministerial colleagues because he often snubbed them.”<sup>28</sup> But tossing this “insufficiently modern” colleague overboard would right the ship of state only for a time. Vitzthum’s speeches in the Landtag had often been as ham-handed as those of Rüger but without the latter’s conviction. “Count Vitzthum, it is true, is well brought-up and educated, but in no way is he a statesman and certainly not a diplomat.” His “astounding ineptness and naïveté” were already reflected in disparaging anecdotes shared among diplomats in Dresden.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the session, one envoy had widened his disrespect to include Landtag deputies and their electors: “The royal Saxon government breathes a sigh of relief that the honorable representatives have returned to their constituencies to call on their household gods, because the Landtag—for the first time in its existence—had had to suffer under the scourge of a highly temperamental opposition aware of its own power.”

Scholars have tried to be even-handed in documenting the progressive features of Saxon political culture after 1909, but they have not succeeded.<sup>30</sup> Based on evidence drawn mainly from municipal politics, which Walter Koch rightly described as more dynamic than state-level politics, they have over-estimated the unity of Saxony’s National Liberal Party. They have under-estimated how deeply-rooted conservatism remained in Saxony’s civil service. And they have put too much store in the wishful thinking of Radicals and Social Democrats. Those parties believed that further reform of the Landtag suffrage, a progressive school bill, and abolition of the upper house could be wrung from Saxon ministers. But they could not.<sup>31</sup>

National events in 1910, 1911, and 1912 also convinced members of Saxony’s “state-supporting parties” that neither the “red threat” nor the spectre of democracy had been vanquished. Prussian suffrage reform, Berlin’s Morocco policy, national elections—these all prevented Saxon politics from settling into a new groove. A minority of observers at the time believed that the “democratic” suffrage of 1909 would foster a more equitable, more *workable* parliamentary culture. They imagined that state leaders would actually lead and that Social Democrats would actually pursue the politics of the possible.<sup>32</sup> Yet to most non-socialist politicians in Saxony, the SPD remained a pariah. When the next Landtag session opened in November 1911, the National Liberals and Conservatives were still fighting each other in ways that did not augur well for the upcoming Reichstag elections.<sup>33</sup> In the *Präsidium* election at the outset of the session, the Social Democrat Julius Fräßdorf was elected second vice-president, in part because the Conservatives cast white ballots in protest. Friedrich August III and Vitzthum were angered by this “stupidity” and by the Conservatives’ claim that their tactic had been a “master stroke.” Austria’s new envoy in Dresden reported that Fräßdorf’s election had “excited attention not only in Saxony, but in all Germany”: it was “a sign of the

<sup>28</sup> Fürstenberg, 2.3.10, *ibid.*      <sup>29</sup> Montgelas, 27.7.10 (draft), cited previously.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Schmeitzner/Rudloff, *Geschichte*, 37; cf. Ritter, “Wahlrecht,” 52.

<sup>31</sup> Schmeitzner/Rudloff, *Geschichte*, 40f.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf, *Sozialdemokratie*, 61–85; Schmeitzner/Rudloff, *Geschichte*, 36–41.

<sup>33</sup> Montgelas, 22.12.11 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 969, and for Vitzthum’s speeches cited there.



National Liberal-Progressive-Social Democratic bloc that is forming for the Reichstag elections.”<sup>34</sup> Generally, though, the “parties of order” found a way to cooperate when it was a matter of isolating socialists in Saxony’s parliament. In his speeches Vitzthum continued to inveigh against the unreliability of the Social Democrats, their “systematic seduction of youth,” and their “terror against those willing to work.” Conservatives and many National Liberal Landtag deputies rejoiced when the *Präsidium* elections of November 1913 produced a Landtag executive that was once again “socialist-free” (*sozialistenrein*)<sup>35</sup>

When war broke out in August 1914, Saxons could look back on five years of rudderless governance.<sup>36</sup> No significant advance had been made in the direction of parliamentarism or democracy, and a political gulf still divided Social Democrats from “right-thinking” burghers. In these ways, Saxons shared the experience of many other Germans.<sup>37</sup>

#### PRUSSIA’S THREE-CLASS SUFFRAGE, 1910

On 22 November 1909, *Simplicissimus* published a satirical cartoon bearing the title “*Die rote Saxonía*” (Plate 11). On the left stands Saxonía, holding a green-and-white banner, wearing a white toga and comfortable slippers, and sporting a headpiece made of industrial smokestacks. Her skin is colored an odd shade of red and she appears slightly emaciated. On the right, a much plumper, pale-faced “Prussia” stands in military uniform. On her feet are military boots with high heels, and her head boasts the fur busby that Kaiser Wilhelm wore when he visited his personal Hussar bodyguard regiment. She is leaning over to pick up a large vase, of the kind that was still sometimes used to collect ballots in Prussia’s public (i.e., non-secret) voting system. Inside the rim of the vase one can spy red dots. On the ground beside “Prussia” stands an unopened bottle of champagne with a red monster lurking behind it. Reaching out a reassuring hand, Saxonía dispenses her best advice about suffrage reform: “No, my good Borussia, don’t pick such a new voting pot for yourself; mine gave me the measles.”<sup>38</sup>

Drawn by Thomas Theodor Heine, this cartoon is not unambiguous. Published barely two weeks after the final tally was known from Saxony’s one-and-only plural Landtag election and on the very day the Prussian state ministry met to devise its own

<sup>34</sup> Austrian envoy to Saxony, Count Johann Forgách von Ghymes und Gács, 11.11.11, HHStAV, PAV/54.

<sup>35</sup> Acting Austrian envoy Ritter von Egger (Dresden), 14.11.13, HHStAV, PAV/54; Montgelas, 13.11.11 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 969.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Koch observed that Vitzthum viewed all politics from the perspective of a district governor from Annaberg, which was actually Vitzthum’s post (1901–06) before he became Saxon envoy to Prussia. SHStAD, NL Walter Koch, Nr. 1, Bd. 1 (MS.); cf. Venus, *Amtshauptmann*, 22 (he too was AHM Annaberg, 1926–8).

<sup>37</sup> On the granting of universal suffrage to Alsace-Lorraine in May 1911, after a plural suffrage had been considered and rejected, Silverman, *Reluctant Union*, 141–7; Bohlmann, “Deutschkonservative Partei,” 95–9.

<sup>38</sup> “Die rote Saxonía,” by Thomas Theodor Heine, *Simplicissimus* 14, no. 34 (22 Nov. 1909): 567. The original caption was in Saxon dialect: “Nee, meine kuteste Borussia, schaffe dir ja nich so ä neien Wahltopf an, ich habe von meinen de Masern gekrieche.” “Anschaffen” can also mean to prostitute oneself.

suffrage reform bill, the timing of the cartoon was exquisite. Was Heine ridiculing Prussian Conservatives, who feared *any* reform of Prussia's three-class suffrage? Or was Saxonia's advice meant in earnest, suggesting that Prussia should not experiment with a major suffrage reform, as Saxony had just done? The first reading is more plausible. Heine's reputation as a harsh critic of Prussian authoritarianism is well-deserved. Yet one would expect Heine to have chosen a more positive symbol than measles to represent the outcome of Saxony's leap in the dark. And rarely did he depict Prussia so benignly. Like all good art, Heine's cartoon is open to multiple readings.

Bethmann's government and Prussian liberals agreed on the intrinsic merit of awarding plural ballots to men of property, wealth, and education. As we have seen, this agreement did not materialize out of thin air.<sup>39</sup> Merely mentioning the possibility of Prussian suffrage reform in the throne speech of 20 October 1908 was as far as Bülow's government would go to sustain liberal hopes (but not dispel conservative fears). The Prussian minister with the most influence over the suffrage issue at that time, Friedrich von Moltke, argued against both options being considered: abolishing the three-class suffrage entirely and replacing it with a plural suffrage, or amalgamating the two systems.<sup>40</sup> Prussian state ministers were divided about what reform might be palatable. During the Prussian Landtag elections of mid-1908, they had seen "state-supporting" candidates fall victim to Conservative-liberal infighting. Some ministers took to heart the *Kreuzzeitung's* defiant cry at that time: "Hold fast to the protection and support that you have with the Landtag suffrage! A replacement of this suffrage with the general Reichstag suffrage means the final rule of the masses!"<sup>41</sup> Soon, even the faint hope of Prussia's "organic development" was sidetracked by the *Daily Telegraph* Affair in late 1908.

In the autumn of 1909, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg took a different tack. It mirrored lessons learned from Saxony.<sup>42</sup> A reformed suffrage was intended by Bethmann to favor the privileged classes, to disadvantage workers, and to prevent Social Democrats from "flooding" another German Landtag. The premises upon which a Prussian suffrage reform were to be based sounded strikingly familiar to Saxons: no realignment of Landtag constituencies because it would disadvantage Prussian agrarians; no consideration of universal manhood suffrage because it was "too democratic"; no secret ballot because it fostered subversive agitation and unpatriotic voting; no proportional representation because it would eliminate voters' attachment to a single candidate; and no occupational suffrage because it was anachronistic. At this point the Prussians looked favorably on a plural suffrage. But then voting returns from the Saxon Landtag elections of October–November 1909 became available, and the Prussians changed course.

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<sup>39</sup> See the discussion in ch. 11.

<sup>40</sup> AB-PrStMin, 9:222; Bohlmann, "Deutschkonservative Partei," 72; Wulff, "Deutschkonservativen," 108.

<sup>41</sup> KZ, 2.6.08.

<sup>42</sup> Wulff, "Deutschkonservativen," and Gerhards/Rössel, *Interessen*, are inferior to KDWR, 529–69, esp. 530–7 on a plural suffrage.

Was reform of Prussia's three-class suffrage intentionally botched by Bethmann Hollweg in 1910? The question remains open; but the failure to reform Prussia's reactionary suffrage had immense consequences for Imperial Germany's last decade and dismal end. The history of this non-event has been told so often that only two of its features merit brief elaboration here. They are framed by an observation from the British envoy in Dresden, A.C. Grant Duff. This diplomat thought it necessary to explain to the Foreign Office in London why, in February 1910, the National Liberals' *Leipziger Tageblatt* had criticized Bethmann's suffrage bill. He quoted the *Tageblatt's* critique at some length—thereby attracting the attention of Eyre Crowe and others—because it demonstrated the truth of Kaiser Wilhelm's words to Bethmann Hollweg: the new chancellor faced a thankless task in liquidating his inheritance from Bülow.<sup>43</sup> During his Bloc experiment, Bülow had been as disingenuous as Vitzthum's ministry in Saxony after 1909, or so it appeared to Grant Duff. Bülow had "considered it advisable to complicate the situation as far as possible," wrote the envoy, "because he knew the Germans have a modest opinion of their political capacity and are not inclined to cut the Gordian Knot as tied by the bureaucracy with the sword of sound common sense." In Grant Duff's opinion, the *Tageblatt* had put its finger on the absurdity of stalemate—whether in Prussia or Saxony: "If parliament makes demands which cannot be met, the government will be released from all responsibility. The government too has its own convictions. Reform is also a matter of conviction. Long live conviction!"<sup>44</sup>

On 18 November 1909, Prussia's interior ministry had asked the Saxon government to send—with utmost haste—all relevant statistical returns from the Landtag election completed barely a fortnight before. The Prussians were especially interested to learn how many Saxon electors were privileged to cast two, three, or four ballots, and—it almost goes without saying—for which parties they had voted.<sup>45</sup> In the Prussian case, the goal was to create a "promotion system" whereby privileged voters would move into a higher voting class on the basis of certain social and economic criteria. In the Prussian draft, criteria for preferment included not only the school-leaving certificate that qualified an elector for one-year military service but also the holding of an "honorary office" or "a public function."

The draft bill that was discussed in the Prussian state ministry meeting of 22 November 1909 proposed a lengthy catalogue of criteria for promotion to the next higher voting class. Any elector would be eligible to vote in the top (first) class if he was an *Akademiker* whose high-school diploma was dated at least five years in the past; if he was an elector who had belonged for at least three years to the Reichstag, the Landtag, or a provincial or local representative body; or if he had served at least three years as an active military officer. Promotion from the third to the second voting class was reserved for *Einjährig-Freiwilliger*, for an elector with twelve years of military

<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm II to Bethmann Hollweg, 31.12.11, cited in Zmarzlik, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Grant Duff, 13.2.10 (draft), PRO, FO 215/57. See this and other reports on the Pr. suffrage bill, including British Ambassador to Germany Edward Goschen (Berlin) to British FO, 16.1.10 and 15.2.10, in BFO-CP, FO 371/903, reel 30, pp. 77–136 passim. Goschen was the sixth son of Wilhelm Heinrich Göschen, originally of Leipzig.

<sup>45</sup> Pr. Mdl to Pr. MdAA, 18.11.09 (copy), PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 8.

service, and for anyone over the age of sixty. That the Prussians set the age for preferment ten years higher than the Saxons did demonstrates the power of statistics and the influence of intra-German comparisons. Prussian statisticians calculated that 30.8 percent of electors in 1908 were aged fifty and older, while only 15.5 percent exceeded the age of sixty. Just two weeks earlier, Saxons had woken up to the fact that many voters casting two ballots for Social Democratic candidates were eligible to do so only because they had reached their fiftieth birthday. The Saxon outcome ensured that a plural system would no longer find favor among Prussian ministers. Moderate conservatives such as State Secretary of the Interior Clemens Delbrück and Justice Minister Maximilian Beseler now rejected a plural suffrage: it would “deliver Prussia to the SPD, the Poles, or the ‘masses.’”<sup>46</sup>

Over the course of the next six months, both tactical and strategic maneuvering left the government’s original proposal in shambles. Only a minority of Prussian state ministers clung to one central feature of three-class voting that the Saxons had abandoned with relatively little fuss, namely, indirect voting (first for delegates, then for deputies to parliament). Even staunchly conservative ministers like Georg von Rheinbaben (finance) and Bernhard von Arnim (agriculture) were willing to accept direct voting for deputies.<sup>47</sup> According to Clemens Delbrück’s comment at the state ministry meeting of 27 December 1909, introducing direct voting would give the government bill “backbone.” These observations fell into line with martial metaphors that for decades had described three-class voting as an essential defense against the enemy. In 1909 Saxon National Liberals had referred to the Prussian suffrage as an “unscalable barbed-wire fence” against Social Democracy.<sup>48</sup>

Prussian ministers also distanced themselves from the preferment of certain groups, especially the elderly. The *Kulturträgerparagrafen* were watered down by conservative arguments that also reflected fears entertained in Saxony. Some of these changes demanded a longer waiting time or a higher tax threshold for preferment. The conservative Rheinbaben expressed disgust that even preferment on the basis of age alone would be available to workers. As he put it, if an elector were moved into a higher voting class only because of his age, this would have “unacceptably democratizing . . . consequences.” It was outrageous that “a mentally and physically infirm pensioner . . . [could] vote in the second class, but the farmer, in the full health of life, might possibly [vote] in the third.”<sup>49</sup>

In short, the electoral landscapes in Prussia and Saxony after 1909 were similar in one important respect: democracy’s advance had to be stopped. A shorthand account of the Prussian state ministry discussions of 22 November 1909 makes this clear:

Reform of the Prussian suffrage. With it Wilhelm II wants to be left in peace. The pressure of timing due to public opinion and the next Reichstag elections . . . The necessary decision between voting systems. One can thereby retain the foundations of the present suffrage with a good conscience and merely eliminate . . . deficiencies.

<sup>46</sup> AB-PrStMin, 10:46; more detail in KDWR, 531–5.

<sup>47</sup> AB-PrStMin, 10:50; KDWR, 534. <sup>48</sup> *NLVBl*, 1.8.09, p. 141.

<sup>49</sup> Protocol excerpt (22.11.09) cited in KDWR, 535.

*Rejection of a plural suffrage system* . . . Significance of reform for Germany. Because the south German states are increasingly deteriorating into democracy, the fruitful development of the Reich depends more and more on Prussia alone and imposes on it the obligation to guard against similar democratization.<sup>50</sup>

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The stormy Saxon Landtag sessions of 17 and 24 February 1910 occurred just when the Prussian suffrage reform movement peaked. Haughty anti-liberal speeches were delivered in the Prussian House of Deputies while Social Democratic rallies filled Berlin's streets and parks. In *Simplicissimus*, Thomas Theodor Heine again took up his pen. This time his cartoon made light of Bethmann's ill-fated bill; but it also pointed a finger in another direction:

Once again a horribly mutilated corpse has been found in Berlin. Because it was wrapped in the manuscript of the throne speech, it could easily be identified as "the Prussian suffrage." Police dogs immediately picked up the trail, which led to the steps of the throne, on which the murderer was found sitting quietly. His name is Bethmann Hollweg. The accused was able to prove that the apparently mutilated body had never possessed hands or feet. He had only wrung its neck a little. Because the removal of this completely unserviceable creature was characterized as an eminently charitable deed, the murderer was not prosecuted; he was awarded the Order of the Black Eagle from on high.<sup>51</sup>

When Prussia's suffrage reform bill was withdrawn in May 1910 because Bethmann's government was unwilling to embrace meaningful reform, the outcome was eerily familiar to what also happened in Saxony around the same time. Serious reform of Saxony's upper house had always been a long shot. With a divided National Liberal caucus, no pro-reform majority could be mustered in the Saxon Landtag. In Prussia, the movement to abolish three-class voting had a different history. It had been growing for decades, not just a few years; it mobilized wider sections of public and private opinion; and it dominated national politics and international opinion in ways that even Saxony's pioneering debate never did. Yet when suffrage reform failed in Prussia, it soured the political center in a way we have already witnessed in Saxony. Moderates agreed that their government leader would never grow into an able statesman. Further to the right we find a common fear that the SPD would rededicate itself to "the total overthrow of the existing state and society," despite evidence from southern Germany that Social Democrats were moving away from the path of revolution.

The Reichstag elections of January 1912 confirmed that the failure of electoral reform in Prussia was going to cast a long shadow. Before the elections, Bethmann wrote that the Conservatives, "with their personal, social, religious, and political hubris and intolerance," had "succeeded in focusing everyone's disgust and dissatisfaction against the three-class suffrage, which is generally seen as an expression of

<sup>50</sup> AB-PrStMin, 10:46 (emphasis added); the last sentence is cited from KDWR, 533.

<sup>51</sup> "Schauderhaftes Verbrechen in Berlin," by Thomas Theodor Heine, *Simplicissimus* 14, no. 48 (28.2.10): 827. See Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

Junker predominance.”<sup>52</sup> Bethmann added that Conservatives and National Liberals had “apparently not yet fully understood the danger to their parliamentary strength. Perhaps they will first have to pass through the hard school of Reichstag elections.”<sup>53</sup>

## STIRRINGS

A new bloc is in the process of being founded, a bloc of Social Democrats, Progressives, and the National Liberals, . . . the Pink-Red Bloc.

—Hauptverein der Deutsch-Konservativen, *Vademecum zur Reichstagswahl 1912*<sup>54</sup>

The best party is but a kind of conspiracy against the rest of the nation.

—George Savile, Lord Halifax, 1750<sup>55</sup>

The degree to which the “parties of order” remained estranged years after Chancellor Bülow’s departure from office is underscored by an anecdote told by Eugen Schiffer, who belonged to the right wing of the National Liberal Party and later served as minister of finance and minister of justice in the Weimar Republic.<sup>56</sup> In his memoirs, Schiffer recalled an evening shortly after the start of the First World War, when Bethmann had invited a group of parliamentarians to join him for dinner.<sup>57</sup> Afterward, Bethmann pointed out to Schiffer that, across the room, the Social Democratic leader Philipp Scheidemann—Weimar’s first chancellor—was engaged in lively conversation with a group of non-socialist deputies. Bethmann was impressed: “Here you see the new age and the new forces it needs,” he told Schiffer confidently. At this point Bethmann spied the National Liberal leader Ernst Bassermann and the Conservative leader Ernst von Heydebrand speaking in another corner of the room. Their conversation was “apparently very intimate and friendly.” That too made the chancellor’s heart flutter: the “domestic unification of the German people is advancing everywhere.” Reich Chancellery Chief Arnold Wahnschaffe was sent over to Bassermann to assure him how “pleased and grateful” the chancellor was to see this conversation taking place between party leaders who had been at each other’s throats for half a decade. A few minutes later, Bassermann pulled Schiffer aside. He was beet red with embarrassment. Just before Wahnschaffe cut in, Heydebrand had been saying to Bassermann: “We both know that we can’t stand each other; but we agree completely in our estimation of our man of the house. We should at least be able to cooperate to show him the door as quickly possible.”

<sup>52</sup> Citations from Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 79, including Bethmann to Bülow, 14.7.11. Cf. Retallack, *Notables*, 208–15.

<sup>53</sup> Bethmann Hollweg telegram to Wilhelm II, 28.8.10, ZStAM, 2.2.1, Nr. 667.

<sup>54</sup> DKP, *Vademecum*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Lord Halifax, *Political, Moral, and Miscellaneous Thoughts and Reflections* (1750).

<sup>56</sup> See Frölich, “Nationalliberaler,” 156–61.

<sup>57</sup> Schiffer, *Leben*, 187f.; BAK, NL Schiffer, Nr. 1, “Memoiren.” Cf. Retallack, *German Right*, 392f.

That Bethmann had just congratulated these men for plotting his own downfall made the National Liberal leader blush. It did not have the same effect—one feels sure—on Heydebrand. Schiffer saw in this incident one of Bethmann's defining characteristics: he was jinxed as an *Unglücksrabe*—a luckless individual.

#### PREPARING FOR JANUARY 1912

The previous chapter dealt with the fallout from the demise of the Bülow Bloc after July 1909. It noted the continuing growth of Social Democracy's organizational strength, fervor, and self-confidence; the inability of government leaders—Bethmann Hollweg in the Reich, Count Vitzthum in Saxony—to overcome animosity between National Liberals and Conservatives; and worries expressed by state authorities about the threat posed by a resurgent left liberalism.<sup>58</sup> These elements of Germany's evolving electoral culture were evident during campaigns leading to Saxony's Landtag election of 1909 and the Reichstag election of 1912. After the votes were counted in January 1912, Saxony looked more like the rest of Germany than ever before.

The Reichstag election campaign of 1911–12 was longer than anyone expected.<sup>59</sup> It was assumed in 1910 that Bethmann would call a national election before the natural five-year term of the January 1907 Reichstag expired. That way he might claim a mandate for himself, perhaps rally the state-supporting parties, and return to the rhythm of June elections. But in February 1911 Bethmann was exasperated that the Reichstag had accomplished so little on his watch, and a fall session was added. By early 1912, Germany's fiscal situation was expected to look rosier, perhaps throwing water on the opposition's vitriol against the new taxes legislated in 1909.<sup>60</sup> And "reliable" rural voters would turn out at the polls in greater numbers in January than in June.<sup>61</sup> Still, the Social Democrats were winning by-elections. The Conservative Party's newssheet warned that "*in no constituency, no matter how secure it may appear, is one safe from surprises.*"<sup>62</sup> August Bebel predicted ninety seats for his party, Bethmann Hollweg eighty to one hundred, Hans Delbrück 120.<sup>63</sup> Why would the chancellor call the election any earlier than necessary?

<sup>58</sup> Cf. inter alia Heckart, *Bassermann*, 186–208; Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 85–91; Retallack, *German Right*, ch. 10; Westarp, *Konservative Politik*, 1:173–89; on elections, Bertram, *Wahlen*; Grenquist, "Elections"; Griefmer, *Massenverbände*; Schmädke, *Wählerbewegung*; Sperber, *Voters*, 254–64. Among older works see Groh, *Integration*, 265–89, and Stegmann, *Erben*, 208–448. Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*, deals with the 1912 election in half a line, 272.

<sup>59</sup> Most of the following campaign reports are in SHStAD, Mdl 5391–2. Förstenberg and his successors provided "Übersichten" for Leipzig (1911–17), SHStAD, KHMSL 254–5; cf. police reports on Dresden and Chemnitz (1912), SHStAD, Mdl 11064.

<sup>60</sup> See Nonn, *Verbraucherprotest*.

<sup>61</sup> Vitzthum (Dresden) to Saxony's envoy to Prussia, Baron Ernst von Salza und Lichtenau (Berlin) (draft), 4.2.11, and reply, 7.2.11 (80–100 seats); SHStAD, MdAA 1431.

<sup>62</sup> DKP, *Mitteilungen*, 20.8.10 (original emphasis).

<sup>63</sup> Bebel to Victor Adler and Bebel to Luise Kautsky, 12/19.1.12, cited in Machl, *Bebel*, 487; *PrJbb* (n.d.) cited in Koch, *Volk*, 60. See also AB-PrStMin, 10:76–8; Grenquist, *Elections*, 105; Bertram, *Wahlen*, 125–8.

In February 1911 the Conservatives had complicated things for themselves by starting an all-too-public discussion about the party's run-off strategy for the forthcoming elections. The Conservatives declared they could not support a Progressive even if he found himself in a run-off election against a Social Democrat.<sup>64</sup> The *Nationalliberale Korrespondenz* struck back, accusing the Conservatives of a "long-shot gamble" that would lead, "through the Red Sea," to an "extremely dangerous experiment for the health of the whole nation."<sup>65</sup> These and other statements simmered for the rest of the year. Then Heydebrand used a meeting of East Prussian Conservatives to issue four "minimal" demands of liberals who might seek Conservative support at the polls—knowing full well that the liberals' own election manifestos made three of them unacceptable.<sup>66</sup> The German Left correctly saw in Heydebrand's fourth demand a veiled appeal for new exceptional laws.<sup>67</sup> It called on liberals to "support all measures that might be taken to protect civil society against Social Democracy." This amounted to a blank check for anti-socialist legislation and possibly a coup d'état. If any doubt remained on this score, the haughty agrarian Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau dispelled it. "We have to [go] through the Red Sea!" he declared in December 1911, just weeks before the general election.<sup>68</sup>

As the Conservatives drifted rightward, National Liberal leader Ernst Bassermann headed in the opposite direction. His hesitant opening to the left won him no friends in the Reich chancellery. Bethmann Hollweg complained about the National Liberals almost as often as he railed against Heydebrand's "*Desperado-politik*." The chimera of a leftist bloc "from Bassermann to Bebel" seemed to haunt Bethmann. But such a bloc was just that—chimerical, unreal. One day Bebel and Bassermann happened to meet in the foyer of the Reichstag. "Bebel went up to Bassermann and said with his usual joviality: 'So, honorable *Herr Blockbruder*, how do things stand?'—to which Bassermann answered, '*Ach*, what nonsense.'" Bebel's own reply? "Agreed."<sup>69</sup>

An anti-socialist rallying-together as in 1887 and 1907 was equally out of reach. This time the left liberals would refuse to join.<sup>70</sup> By late 1911 the chancellor appeared to accept the coming election disaster.<sup>71</sup> Bethmann's pessimistic attitude further diminished the Right's respect for him: they gave him the nickname "*Bethmann Soll-Weg*"—"Bethmann should go!"<sup>72</sup> One well-informed journalist wrote in late November 1911 that "even the chancellor, who did not want to believe it before, reckons with 120 Social Democratic deputies or still more."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>64</sup> CC, 15.2.11, and KZ, 16.2.11, cited in Koch, *Volk*, 80.

<sup>65</sup> *NLKorr*, 16.2.11, cited in Koch, *Volk*, 80f.

<sup>66</sup> KZ, 21.12.11; DKP, *Vademecum... 1912*. Anti-Cons. reactions in *NLVBl* 6 (1.12.11, 15.12.11) and 7 (1.1.12).

<sup>67</sup> *Die Hilfe* 17 (1911): 818, cited in Bertram, *Wahlen*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> *DTZ*, 21.12.11, cited in Koch, *Volk*, 113.

<sup>69</sup> Koch, *Volk*, 17. See also Heckart, *Bassermann*, 186–92; Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 194–203.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur von Huhn to Bülow, 28.12.10, cited in Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 195.

<sup>71</sup> BAP, Rkz 1808, Bd. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Banker Paul Schwabach, 29.12.13, cited in Groh, *Integration*, 529.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur von Huhn to Bülow, 20.11.11, BAK, NL Bülow, Nr. 108.



Largely in response to right-wing pleading for a stirring election call, Bethmann planted two articles in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* in the first week of 1912, but they were too little, too late.

All parties save the Social Democrats had to paper over unpopular aspects of their election platforms and their alliances with other parties. According to the SPD, all other parties belonged either to the older "Hottentot-Bloc" or the newer *Schnapsblock*. Foreign policy was not a dominant theme in the election campaign of 1912. The SPD feared alienating lower-middle-class fellow travelers—and even some of their own nationalist members—by attacking Bethmann Hollweg's diplomacy too stridently. The non-socialist parties were also happy to bury the issue after a flare-up between nationalists and Bethmann over the Second Moroccan Crisis in November 1911. The term *Schnapsblock* served the SPD's strategy well: it directed working-class outrage over indirect taxes on brandy and other items against the candidates of all non-socialist parties. The socialists pursued the same goal when they charged that the National Liberals, Conservatives, and Center Party could not win Reichstag elections with their "primitive brush strokes" depicting the "red spectre," as in 1878 and 1887. Too optimistically, a contributor to *Die Neue Zeit* declared that the SPD could no longer be caricatured as the mortal enemy of the state or private property or morality. A new political rhetoric based on the needs of consumers, he predicted, would mobilize German workers in the present election campaign: "hungry stomachs will accept only soup logic with potato-dumpling principles."<sup>74</sup>

This appraisal hit the mark. Consider the heroic image of Eduard von Liebert as we saw him in 1907—"one of the truly best of the nation, an old officer, a proven knight"—and the picture of the same man in 1912 after he attracted far fewer supporters in 14: Borna. One of Saxony's district governors reported that left liberals depicted Liebert "not as a 'man of the people, and from the people,' but rather as 'Prussian,' as 'aristocratic,' as a 'general' who cannot know 'where the shoe pinches.'" This governor added with obvious disdain that universal suffrage, "with its inducement to demagogic election gimmicks," was leading Germany closer and closer to a situation where "men who stand on a higher plane than the average human no longer come into consideration as a Reichstag deputy."<sup>75</sup>

As in the Saxon Landtag elections of October 1909, the task of parrying Social Democratic propaganda proved difficult for the National Liberals and impossible for the Progressives. The SPD poured scorn on the latter's temerity: The Progressive People's Party "doesn't blow warm and doesn't blow cold, in order not to lose the run-off support of either the reactionaries or the revolutionaries." Not content with attacking the left liberals over armaments and Morocco, the Social Democrats ridiculed them as men without principles. "Out of fear, . . . this worthy party treats its banner like a handkerchief to wipe the right or left nostril according to the greatest need."

<sup>74</sup> "Suppenlogik mit Knödelgründen." For this and the following reference to Progressive handkerchiefs, NZ 30, H. 11 (15.12.11): 1:369–72.

<sup>75</sup> AHM Dr. Bernhard Einert (Borna), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (excerpt), SHStAD, Mdl 5392.

Conservatives had no success in steering Bethmann toward the populist, energetic style of election campaign that Ludwig Asch and Paul Mehnert had helped orchestrate in 1907. In this regard, Saxons found themselves in the same predicament as their party colleagues elsewhere in the Reich. In Baden, one Conservative leader wrote to the Reich chancellery asking for government help for his small, struggling party in his "little land of liberalism."<sup>76</sup> In Prussia, the president of the Reichstag, Count Hans von Schwerin-Löwitz, tried to assure Bethmann that Heydebrand did not speak for all Conservatives. He declared publicly that Conservatives had to support "even the worst *bürgerlich* democrat . . . against any Social Democrat."<sup>77</sup> Bethmann did not miss a beat in writing to Schwerin and appealing to his traditional political instincts, much as Chancellor Caprivi had appealed to Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha's old-style conservatism in 1892. The Conservatives, Bethmann wrote, could not allow themselves to be "degraded to the level of the other parties who live from party egoism." If they did, the result would be "the weakening of the conservative principle and thereby the acceleration of democratization." Bethmann was "watching this unhealthy process with growing concern."<sup>78</sup>

Someone else was watching too. By August 1911 Paul Mehnert had become frantic that electoral disaster was looming. Since the Conservatives' poor showing in the Landtag election of 1909, things had not improved. In February 1910, the Saxon envoy in Berlin had heard fears "that Saxony will send *only* Social Democrats to the Reichstag."<sup>79</sup> Mehnert's chief avenue to appeal to the chancellor, as in 1907, was through former chancellery chief Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell,<sup>80</sup> who he hoped could persuade the chancellor that Bassermann and Heydebrand did not represent all factions within the National Liberal and Conservative parties. The enmity between them, Mehnert believed, *had* to be overcome if the Reich were to survive the upcoming Reichstag elections. "Paul I" could not work miracles. But he had a plan.

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In 1911, the split between left-wing and right-wing National Liberals that had unfolded on the floor of the Saxon Landtag in 1910 was playing out on the national stage. Conservatives like Mehnert were glad to see right-wing National Liberals disavow Bassermann. As a contributor to *Die Grenzboten* wrote, Conservatives were trying "to play the [National Liberal] Reichstag and Landtag caucuses against each other, incite the *Jungen* against the *Alten*, in short, to sow discord and drive a wedge

<sup>76</sup> Baron Udo von La Roche-Starkenfels to Arnold Wahnschaffe, 7.10.10, BAK, Rkz 1391.

<sup>77</sup> *NLBI* 23, H. 28 (16.7.11): 332ff.; cf. *CC*, 4.7.11; *DTZ*, 22.6.11; *KZ*, 23.6.11; Bertram, *Wahlen*, 38; Grenquist, "Elections," 50–2.

<sup>78</sup> Bethmann Hollweg to Schwerin Löwitz (draft), 1.7.11, BAK, Rkz 1391. Cf. worried reports by Saxon envoys in Munich and Thuringia; SHStAD, Außenministerium 1431.

<sup>79</sup> Salza und Lichtenau (Berlin) to MdAA Vitzthum (Dresden) (copy), 7.2.11, SHStAD, Mdl 5436 (emphasis added).

<sup>80</sup> Loebell was ill and not at the center of power. His years as chancellery chief had ended with Bülow's departure in 1909, and he would not become Pr. Mdl until 1914. BAK, NL Loebell, Nr. 26–7, "Erinnerungen."

into the party.”<sup>81</sup> This view was correct. The Conservative *Kreuzzeitung* declared that the “policy of rallying together” was impossible because of “ambitious liberal Jews.” The Agrarian League’s *Korrespondenz* defamed the Hansa League and the “un-German . . . red and gold internationals.” It predicted the “political downfall of liberalism” *tout court*.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, a new Saxon newspaper founded in September 1910 “for the national *Bürgertum*” expressed the pessimism and hyperbole that were beginning to infect the Wilhelmine Right.<sup>83</sup> As well as using the usual code-words of *Großkapital* and “stock exchange” to link liberals and Jews, this newspaper sought the support of the “agricultural, industrial, business, and salaried *Mittelstand*” to meet the danger of Social Democracy. “The agitational and electoral successes of Social Democracy,” wrote its chief editor Hugo Meyer (Dresden), “demonstrate with blatant clarity the unstoppable *process of disintegration* of the national parties. The political constellation has not drifted, but rather jumped, *to the left*.” Extreme measures were called for: “The Social Democratic press must in the future be subject to exceptional censorship, just like Social Democratic associations and assemblies . . . Because we live in a *Rechtsstaat*”—a state governed by the rule of law—“the big criminals must also be hanged, and these are the Social Democratic editors and agitators. One must finally lay on the ax in order to free our people from these socially dangerous parasites.”<sup>84</sup>

Mehnert saw an opportunity for the “state-supporting parties” in Saxony to exploit such sentiment to their electoral advantage. In August 1911 he wrote a *cri de cœur* to his friend Loebell. When Bethmann and Loebell replied to Mehnert’s appeal, their letters suggested that the goal of combining anti-socialist and anti-liberal campaigns at this juncture was not doomed to failure.<sup>85</sup> In the end, this strategy could not prevent many Conservative, National Liberal, and Progressive defeats in January 1912. The fact that Mehnert was laid up with a serious case of gout in early January 1912 merits more than a footnote, given how frantically he had worked in January 1907 to eliminate competing *bürgerlich* candidacies in Saxony. As the 1912 election approached, the non-socialist parties in Saxony waited in vain for a stirring election rallying cry from Bethmann. Blame for *that* sin of omission cannot be laid at Mehnert’s feet.

On 10 August 1911, Mehnert had had a conversation “lasting many hours” with the right-wing Saxon National Liberal deputy, Rudolf Heinze, who represented 5: Dresden-Old City and was to become Saxony’s government leader in October 1918. Heinze, Mehnert assured Loebell, “belongs to the *right* wing of the National

<sup>81</sup> *Gb* 69, Bd. 1, Nr. 8 (Feb. 1910): 340.

<sup>82</sup> *KZ* cited in *Gb* 69, Bd. 4, Nr. 50 (Dec. 1910): 580; *KorrBdL*, 29.12.11, cited in Puhle, *Interessenpolitik*, 131; Stegmann, *Erben*, 232–4.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *DTZ*, 1/3.5.11; cf. clippings in SHStAD, MdI 10995.

<sup>84</sup> StadtAD, *Landeszeitung für das Königreich Sachsen* . . . , Probenummer 1.9.10, Nr. 1, 1.10.10 (original emphasis). Labeling such enemies “*gemeingefährlich*” conjured up Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law.

<sup>85</sup> For the following, Mehnert to Loebell, 11.8.11 (copy) (original emphases); Loebell to Bethmann, 14.8.11; Bethmann to Loebell (draft), 16.8.11; Bethmann to Mehnert (draft), 26.10.11 and 9.11.11; Loebell to Bethmann, 12.11.11; Bethmann to Loebell (draft), 20.11.11; BAK, Rkz 1391/5.

Liberals and is without doubt an honorable and good patriot." Because Heinze was "deeply disturbed by Bassermann's course of action," he wanted to prevent right-wing National Liberals "from being forced to move along the slippery path to the left." It was time, Heinze felt, to take the initiative and "hold these elements as far as possible on the side of the Conservatives." According to Heinze, "roughly the same standpoint" was held by prominent National Liberals in Prussia, including Eugen Schiffer. However, these men urgently needed to see an encouraging signal from the Conservatives. A "certain feeling-out" among these politicians could have the immediate benefit "that the coming Reichstag election would play out in much milder form between the Conservatives and National Liberals and would prepare the way later for renewed cooperation." The goal was to ensure that the election campaign did not alienate the two parties on the right which—Mehnert and Heinze agreed—"more or less belong together."<sup>86</sup>

What was Mehnert's formula for electoral success? It had a national and a regional component.<sup>87</sup> A "reliable" majority in the next Reichstag had to be found for legislation considered necessary (by the Right) for Germany's national security and economic well-being. At the same time, Mehnert had dedicated his efforts since 1903 to erase the shameful label "Red Saxony." To achieve the latter goal it was necessary to lump together the left-wing National Liberals (*à la* Stresemann), the left liberals (*à la* Günther), and the Social Democrats in order for the "parties of order" to win as many Saxon seats as possible. Mehnert did not dream of recreating the success of 1907, but he did not want to relive the nightmare of 1903. Because Vitzthum's state ministry in Saxony was showing signs in 1911 that it was willing to deal with the SPD as a legitimate political party—for example by inviting the SPD to discuss pending legislation and by permitting May Day parades<sup>88</sup>—it was important, Mehnert felt, to show the way toward a *national* political reorientation and keep democracy at bay.

To Loebell, Mehnert expressed pessimism about success in Saxony. He was planning to make overtures to the National Liberals there, even though most members of the regional party—"with a diminishing number of exceptions"—would be "completely horrified" by such a prospect. No compromise agreement would be possible between Conservatives and National Liberals to meet the challenge of election pacts between left liberals and socialists. But Mehnert would do his duty as a German patriot. "If one allows the National Liberals to keep marching further to the left," he wrote, "without making the attempt to hold to our side the better . . . elements, then one may not be surprised if, later, the entire situation of the Reich descends further into dangerous liberal-democratic waters." Neither Mehnert nor Heinze was suggesting that "an *agreement* should be sought with the right-wing National Liberals at the moment." But both men believed

<sup>86</sup> Mehnert and Loebell believed Heydebrand would not be receptive; see Retallack, *German Right*, 391.

<sup>87</sup> On resolutions passed by Saxon Cons. (4.12.11) see Grant Duff, 6.12.11, FO 371/1128, BFO-CP, reel 36, no. 49484. For other materials on the RT campaign in Saxony and the Reich, *ibid.*, reel 37, pp. 338–405 *passim*.

<sup>88</sup> *DJ*, 7.2.11; Hohenlohe, 10.2.11., 9.5.11; PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 20.

that “the *feeling* should be *awakened* among them that we [Conservatives] would gladly see them on our side again.” In this regard, as so often in the past, Saxony could lead the way. Meanwhile, Mehnert continued to grind his ax against Gustav Stresemann: “If personalities like Stresemann—who stands on the farthest left wing of the National Liberal Party and who, as I hear from Heinze, influences Bassermann in the worst way imaginable—were to be removed, that would serve the general good.” Thus the Conservative Party’s short-, medium-, and long-term goals could be achieved together—as long as the 1912 election battle did not “shut out subsequent hand-in-hand cooperation for years to come.”<sup>89</sup>

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In the summer of 1911, Bethmann was too tied up with the Second Moroccan Crisis to devote his full attention to domestic politics. His replies to Loebell and Mehnert made clear that he agreed with their viewpoint, however.<sup>90</sup> “If we don’t want to come fully and finally under the domination of the Center, a bridge must be built between the National Liberals and the Conservatives.” One year earlier Bethmann had tried to do just that but had failed. Sounding very much like a Saxon statesman, Bethmann complained about the “absurd blindness” of the National Liberals, who demanded Prussian suffrage reform and an inheritance tax. In the meantime, the “unbearable domination” of “the little one” (Heydebrand)<sup>91</sup> had been exceeded only by the “unreliability and radicalism” of Bassermann, who continued to follow Stresemann’s counsel. Bethmann found it perfectly understandable that Conservatives were repelled by the National Liberals’ “parliamentary swagger.” He was therefore pleased to hear from Mehnert that some members of these two parties were “beginning to recognize the mistakes of their leadership.”

Heydebrand’s polemical speech in the Reichstag on 9 November 1911 constitutes one of the watersheds of late Wilhelmine history.<sup>92</sup> Having kept his distance from the extreme chauvinism of the Pan-German League for years, on this occasion Heydebrand railed against the chancellor over the Morocco agreement with France, which he claimed had brought shame that only the German sword could dispel. Insiders knew that Heydebrand’s speech was an “*election* speech,” carefully crafted to burnish the Conservative Party’s nationalist credentials.<sup>93</sup> Not all Conservatives were mesmerized. In Loebell’s eyes, Heydebrand’s speech had been “a fine speech, an inspired one, a clever speech, [but] the speech of an *advocatus diaboli*.”

Neither Heydebrand’s new-found radicalism nor his willingness to attack the government impressed Loebell. He was so embarrassed by the *contretemps* in the Reichstag that he felt compelled to speak out. In an impassioned letter to Bethmann, Loebell wrote that Heydebrand’s words did not reflect true Conservative Party opinion.<sup>94</sup> But he advised against a counter-attack. “Too much is at stake, and the

<sup>89</sup> Mehnert to Loebell, 11.8.11 (copy), cited previously; BAP, Rkz 1391/5.

<sup>90</sup> Letters of Aug.–Nov. 1911, cited previously.

<sup>91</sup> Referring to Heydebrand’s diminutive physical stature.

<sup>92</sup> *SBD* (9.11.11), 7718–22. Discussed in Retallack, *German Right*, 389–93, including references to reactions from Loebell, Schiffer, and Bethmann.

<sup>93</sup> See Spitzemberg, *Tagebuch*, 537f.

<sup>94</sup> Correspondence of Nov. 1911, cited previously.



**Figure 13.2.** Election Night in Leipzig, January 1912. A slide projector displays preliminary election returns from 12: Leipzig-City on the side of a building. After a sketch by Franz Kienmayer.

Source: *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig), Nr. 3577 (18 January 1912).

opposition has too many trump cards in its hands already: I don't want to see it have another." He continued the thought, still with elections uppermost in his mind. "We first have to get through the [elections of] 12 January without new complications." The prospect for "good" Reichstag elections were now darker than ever. "Perhaps this day," Loebell reflected, "will mark the beginning of healthier [party] relationships" in Germany. But Loebell was not so sure. Like other conservatives before him, Loebell saw in Heydebrand's "bellowing" for popularity a disturbing sign that the fundamental politicization of German society was far advanced and new evidence that the democratic Reichstag, as a powerful, prestigious institution, endangered Germany's future (see Figure 13.2). For Loebell, "the distaste for *this* political life, as it is reflected in the 'representation of the German people,'" had become too great. Heydebrand expressed a similar view around this time. To his Progressive colleague Hermann Pachnicke, Heydebrand alluded to a disastrous political future. "Objectivity is the death of politics," he declared; "Bethmann does not have the nerves to lead us through a *Schweinerei*. But perhaps the *Schweinerei* must come."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Pachnicke, *Führende Männer*, 64.

## ON THE HUSTINGS

When Saxony's district and regional governors described the tenor of Saxony's Reichstag election campaign in the winter of 1911/12, they chronicled the impact of these national events on local and regional politics. The reverse is also true. When the Saxon king read these reports about grass-roots politicking, he saw few options for Saxony besides muddling through until national politics improved. In one report, the king found indications of "the oft-made claim that the Progressives support the Social Democrats."<sup>96</sup> In the margins of another he expressed satisfaction that a worker and former Social Democrat stood up at a nationalist rally and reproached the SPD.<sup>97</sup> On a third he expressed displeasure that the "parties of order" had put no effort into the contests in 17: Glauchau-Meerene and 19: Stollberg because they were deemed hopeless. "I find that completely false," wrote the king. "Someone who has lost his [courage] from the beginning never wins."<sup>98</sup>

The king's most piquant reaction was penciled in the margin of a report on the bitter race in 9: Freiberg. Characterized by "American advertising" and other "gruesome" tactics, this contest pitted the Conservative incumbent (Eduard Wagner) not only against a Social Democrat but also against Wilhelm Külz, the National Liberal mayor of Bückeburg.<sup>99</sup> Külz was said to have created self-administration for German Southwest Africa during his time (1907–08) as *Reichskommissar*. In 1912, when Külz made public a telegram of support from residents of Windhuk—"three!" residents, wrote the district governor in exasperation—he was ridiculed for relying on the "Windhuk Skat Club." Soon the Conservatives piled on with even more personal attacks. Into this fray waded the former mayor of Freiberg, Dr. Bernhard Blüher, who had the gall to point out that Wagner had not disavowed Heydebrand's *Desperadopolitik*.<sup>100</sup> Blüher's pronouncement tilted voters against the Conservative incumbent: it was even "carried through the streets" by the socialists on their way to victory in the run-off election. Sitting near the bottom rung of the state's administrative ladder, Freiberg's district governor was incensed: so many spoiled ballots were cast in the run-off that their number would have helped Wagner to victory in the first round. Local residents, he reported, had said openly that "a National Liberal man cannot vote for a Conservative—*lieber rot als konservativ*." Friedrich August III was incensed too: "What can the government do against a civil servant like Blüher to prevent him from helping Social Democracy to victory?"<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> AHM Dr. Walter von Pflugk (Bautzen), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (29.1.12), excerpt; SHStAD, Mdl 5392. Other reports cited below are also from this file.

<sup>97</sup> AHM Dr. Franz Edelmann (Flöha), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (31.1.12), excerpt, *ibid*.

<sup>98</sup> AHM Dr. jur. Erdmann Fritsche (Stollberg), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (5.2.12), excerpt, *ibid*.

<sup>99</sup> Bückeburg, in the nearby principality of Schaumburg-Lippe, was so small that Külz admitted he had to look it up on a map when he was appointed mayor.

<sup>100</sup> Conservatives in Dresden supported Heinze without posing Heydebrand's questions to him; *NLVBl* 7 (1.1.12).

<sup>101</sup> AHM Dr. Vollmer (Freiberg), "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (24.2.12) (excerpt), SHStAD, Mdl 5392.

The central actors in this drama provided their own curtain call. In June 1912, Wilhelm Külz was elected mayor of Zittau.<sup>102</sup> In his unpublished memoir, he recalled that the two liberal parties in 1: Zittau fought each other bitterly at that time. The Progressives enjoyed the upper hand. Their *Zittauer Morgenzeitung* had a “strong fighting spirit and good journalistic impact”: with “a trace of demagoguery,” it was both “popular [and] interesting.” The National Liberals’ *Zittauer Nachrichten* had to be more circumspect because it was the local government gazette (Külz described its chief editor as “very comfortable.”) According to his own memoir, Külz was elected mayor in 1912 in order to eliminate Zittau’s “political stink.” This is what Külz felt he wanted to do too, for he leaned toward National Liberalism. But “the waves of politics” continued to “surge into the sitting chambers of municipal government.” This is perhaps unsurprising: the number of voluntary associations in the city (101) exceeded the number of policemen (forty). But it was not the Social Democrats who caused trouble for the mayor: their *Armer Teufel*, renamed the *Oberlausitzer Volkszeitung*, was “generally loyal” to Külz’s activity, and the single SPD assemblyman never caused him “any sort of difficulty”—at least until November 1918. Rather, it was (initially) the enmity between the two liberal parties and (later) the Saxon government in Dresden that put roadblocks in Külz’s path. Zittau had such an unfavorable reputation as a stronghold of left liberalism that the Saxon king would not nominate its mayor to the upper chamber of the Landtag, even when a seat in that chamber came free. The Conservative mayor of Wurzen was selected instead, even though Zittau was Saxony’s sixth-largest city. Three years after Külz took the helm in Zittau, Bernhard Blüher—having demonstrated his credentials in 1912 as a moderate Conservative—was elected mayor of Dresden. Blüher held this post until 1931, when he was succeeded by none other than Wilhelm Külz, who had meanwhile served as Reich interior minister (1926). In 1933 Külz refused Nazi demands to fire colleagues and parliamentarians who were not “brown” enough. In March of that year he refused to hoist the swastika over Dresden’s city hall. These ironies evaporated soon enough under Nazi rule.

One report from Chemnitz neatly summarized the tenor of the 1912 election campaign in Saxony. “The overall impression of the Reichstag election campaign in this governmental region is disunity, lack of appropriate resources for agitation, lack of élan, indeed in many places lack of activity to the point of resignation among the parties of order, which, when they do campaign, battle each other more sharply than Social Democracy, the common enemy. And on [the latter’s] side: astoundingly well-organized, energetic, and self-confident sacrifice for the cause.” The SPD had been sending its “best agitation forces, . . . including women,” into the countryside around Chemnitz for months on end, hammering the themes of high prices, consumer taxes, and the need to “prevent a world war sought by the parties of order.” Almost every Sunday these rural districts were “flooded with provocative and hateful pamphlets” whose contents were “cleverly calculated” to appeal to rural voters and not just factory workers.

<sup>102</sup> NL Wilhelm Külz, Nr. 11 (Lebenserinnerungen) (MS), pp. 22–147; I am grateful to the staff of the BAK for loaning this microfilm to the BAP for my use in June 1994.



Much the same picture characterized the large administrative region of Dresden, which included many traditionally Conservative areas north of the capital. "In almost all parts of the governmental district one sees a marked reserve, even apathy, among the parties of order," reported Regional Governor Rudolf von Oppen in late December 1911. He noted none of the "passion and participation of all social groups" from the winter campaign of 1906/07. "In almost every voting precinct" this time around, "a division has occurred among the *Ordnungsparteien*." Conservatives were suffering the most. "The party that stands furthest to the right seems to have the least prospects for success because, as a result of the predominant dissatisfaction about the cost of living and the Reich finance reform, a liberal faction has established roots even in purely agricultural areas." The district governor in Großenhain provided evidence of this development. He reported with obvious displeasure that four teachers, all under thirty, were agitating on behalf of the local Progressive candidate. They were doing so in a way that had already taken on a "Social Democratic allure." Postal officials were a problem too: they were so infected with left-liberal ideas that one of them was allegedly willing to drop off Progressive flyers to postboxes on his route. Efforts were underway by the local school inspector and post-office director to ensure that the younger cohort under their authority showed more restraint. A "large proportion" of older teachers supported the right-wing parties, reported this district governor; but "they do not declare their allegiance publicly."<sup>103</sup> Even in Leipzig, where the Conservatives helped the National Liberals defend the seat against a concerted socialist onslaught, among all the combatants "the Conservative Party so far has probably been seen publically the least. It holds its meetings mainly for those who are specially invited and works in silence."<sup>104</sup>

Governor von Oppen's other subordinates complained about the new Reich Association Law (1908). They could not report accurately on election rallies because they had to avoid "even the appearance of surveillance." As a result they were "forced to rely mainly on newspaper accounts and private reports." Particularly galling was the "symptomatic proficiency for gauging the mood of the people" shown by tavern owners and others who rented meeting rooms to all parties, not only the "parties of order." As a result, "the holding of Social Democratic meetings has become possible even in the villages where they have never before taken place" (see Figure 13.3).<sup>105</sup>

This new development helped keep the SPD's election costs under control. As the regional governor in Chemnitz reported, "in many localities, [SPD] envoys go from house to house, into factories and taverns, even to dancehalls, to support the Social Democratic election fund. They write down the names of those who make contributions on a list. It is hardly surprising that many people who are not Social

<sup>103</sup> AHM Dr. jur. Georg Uhlemann (Großenhain) to KHM Rudolf von Oppen (Dresden), 10.2.12.

<sup>104</sup> AHM Karl Néale v. Nostitz-Wallwitz to KHMS Leipzig, 10.12.11 (draft), SStAL, AHMS Leipzig, Nr. 14, Bd. 1.

<sup>105</sup> KHM Rudolf von Oppen (Dresden) to Mdl, 20.12.11.

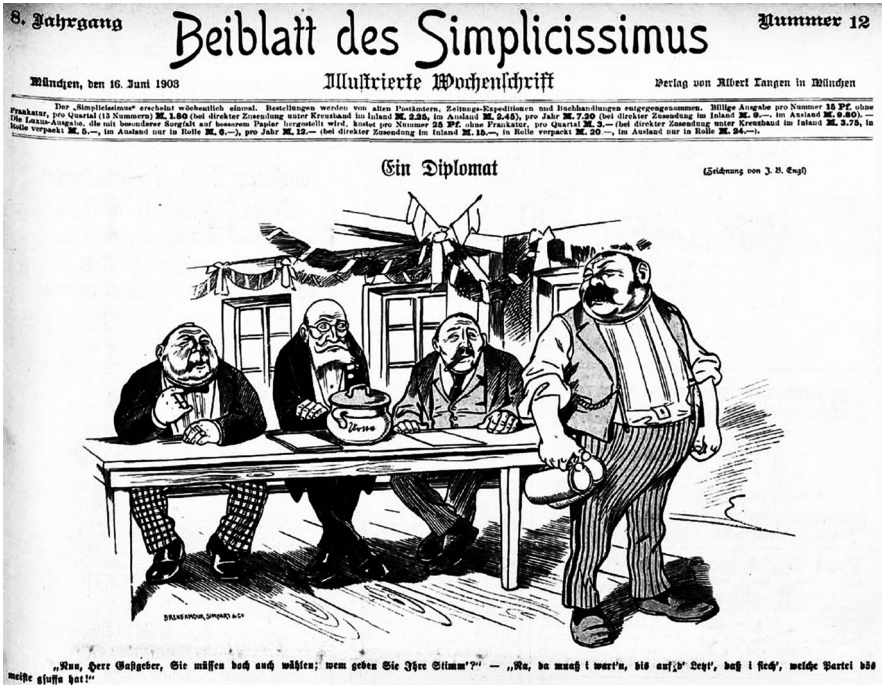


Figure 13.3. “A Diplomat.” The caption reads: “Now, Herr host, you have to vote too; to whom are you going to give your vote?”—“Oh, for that, I have to wait ‘til the end, to see which party has guzzled the most.” The pot in the middle is the voting urn.

Source: “Ein Diplomat,” by Josef Benedikt Engl, *Simplificissimus* 8, Nr. 12, Beiblatt (16 June 1903). *Simplificissimus* Online: Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

Democratic sympathizers allow themselves to be hijacked into giving money out of fear of ‘being maligned’—and worse. When possible, the collectors have been reported, but in the meantime they have achieved their goal.”<sup>106</sup> As another district governor reported for the area around Leipzig, “it is as good as impossible for a non-socialist bricklayer or carpenter to find work; many hundreds of them groan under the pressure that forces them to conceal their true opinion and yet fill the war chest of the political opponent.” In Leipzig’s hinterland, Social Democrats were even able to force tavern owners to deny meeting rooms to associations affiliated with the “parties of order”—for example, the “German-national gymnastics clubs.”<sup>107</sup>

These examples suggest that the state’s effort to produce “good” elections was anything but uniform, even within Saxony. Certainly, “reliable” veterans, “national” youth, and “loyal” workers played their part in subjecting Social Democracy to social ostracism and electoral chicanery. Local army commanders may have instructed their

<sup>106</sup> KHM Karl von Lossow (Chemnitz) to MdI, 5.1.12.

<sup>107</sup> AHM Karl Néale von Nostitz-Wallwitz (Leipzig), “Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911.”

subordinates not to frequent locales where the “riff-raff who fear the light of day” were found. Nevertheless, “the monarchical patriot of the village” could not always muster the courage to enter the tavern “where the Workers’ Marseillaise blared out through open windows at night.”<sup>108</sup>

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In the Reichstag constituency of 21: Annaberg, local Conservatives refused to support Gustav Stresemann in January 1912. He had “fiercely and repeatedly attacked the Conservatives” in the past. He had become “very left-liberal.” And the National Liberal Party made the tactical error of nominating Stresemann without consulting the Conservatives. The latter were not doing much to support their own candidate, a retired navy captain named Meinhold who ended up winning just over 1,000 votes. But the SPD and the National Liberals were waging a bitter campaign. Each side also sought to mobilize women. To a poster calling for women’s suffrage,<sup>109</sup> the SPD added *Liebe Schwester*, a book that offered “very clever letters . . . to win working women for Social Democracy.” With female speakers the socialists were also appealing to women in their public rallies. In Leipzig alone, meetings organized to promote women’s suffrage sometimes drew crowds of over 2,000 listeners.<sup>110</sup> Yet the Leipzig SPD leader Richard Lipinski complained that the party’s only female members were “the wives and daughters of party comrades, but not women factory workers.”<sup>111</sup>

Stresemann was distracted at this time by the need to help National Liberal candidates in Dresden. Stresemann helped commandeer 110 automobiles from the recently founded Saxon Automobile Club, loaned at no cost, to campaign in the Saxon capital. Some 2,800 *Schlepper* urged National Liberal voters out of their homes, and (allegedly) 400,000 party flyers were distributed. (At this time, membership in Dresden’s National Liberal association stood just over 2,000—about one-tenth total party membership in Saxony.)<sup>112</sup> This kind of election campaign was not to everyone’s taste. The *Dresdner Woche* remarked negatively on the bitterness and expense of the local campaign: the propaganda used by the competing parties was more characteristic of what “one heard only in rumors” from “the land of unbounded possibilities, Dollarika” (i.e., the USA).<sup>113</sup>

From the tone of comments made by the regional governor in Zwickau—Friedrich August Fraustadt—and from complaints by Stresemann’s campaign manager Gustav Slesina,<sup>114</sup> it is obvious that Saxon civil servants agreed with Paul Mehnert: Stresemann should be thrown out of the Reichstag. Even though

<sup>108</sup> Both passages from Mühlhausen, “Strategien,” 308f., which—like works by Klaus Saul, Dieter Groh, Dirk Stegmann, and Reinhard Höhn—at times portrays Social Democrats only as victims.

<sup>109</sup> Entitled “Her mit dem Frauenwahlrecht.”

<sup>110</sup> Dobson, *Authority*, 85.

<sup>111</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 266, cited in Dobson, *Authority*, 92.

<sup>112</sup> *NLVBl* 7 (20.3.12), 41f.

<sup>113</sup> *Dresdner Woche* (18.1.12) and other details in Pohl, *Stresemann*, 169–71.

<sup>114</sup> Gustav Slesina to Vitzthum, 13.1.12, and for the following; SHStAD, Mdi 5392; “National gesinnter Frauen” cited in Pohl, *Stresemann*, 184. The campaign was a “financial disaster” for Stresemann.

the Conservatives declared initially that they would support Stresemann in a run-off against the SPD, Mehnert was at work behind the scenes. The Conservatives nominated a candidate (Meinold) who was meant to mobilize supporters who would otherwise stay at home rather than vote for Stresemann. The Social Democratic candidate Ernst Grenz was considered "stale" even by his own people—he had been the SPD candidate since 1890—but Stresemann could not overcome the obstacles to his re-election. He won only 43 percent of first-ballot votes compared to Grenz's 54 percent, and so did not even force a run-off. According to Slesina, the government's semi-official gazettes had distanced themselves from Stresemann. "Frivolous and hateful" Conservative flyers had been directed his way. And "a number of small business owners and farmers" had been persuaded to cast "red ballots." In Slesina's eyes, the façade of neutrality among Saxon *Amtsblätter* masked a bigger problem: "If Saxony becomes a red kingdom again, then the government's provincial press will have done its share in making it so."

Government leader Vitzthum refused to concede that Conservatives had scuttled Stresemann's election, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Regional Governor Fraustadt was more disappointed to see the Progressive Günther defeated in 23: Plauen than to see Stresemann lose in 21: Annaberg. After the election, he wrote that Günther, though doctrinaire and "a bluffer according to true Radical traditions," was a "faithful friend of his Saxon Fatherland." No such praise was in order for Stresemann, for whom the governor "could not shed a tear." The future chancellor's most damning fault in 1912 was that he could not make peace with allies on the Right. Fraustadt wrote that "Dr. Stresemann, always glib and, to my sensibilities, rather insolent, achieved all that was humanly possible in his rabble-rousing against the right-wing parties."<sup>115</sup>

To borrow a phrase from American football, these administrators' reports document the "ground game" that pushed Saxon Social Democrats over the goal-line in nineteen Saxon constituencies in January 1912. Even though the election campaign struck these observers as topsy-turvy, only rarely did misplays benefit Saxony's non-socialist parties. Grass-roots campaigning on behalf of "state-supporting" candidates was so weak, and tension between the liberal and conservative parties was so strong, that Saxon administrators expressed deep pessimism after the election. Baron Maximilian von Oer, district governor in Meißen, spoke for many others in this regard. "Previously," Oer wrote, "one was permitted to hope that the growing number of Social Democratic votes would compel the *bürgerlich* parties to a united defense of the legal order." But due to the conduct of Progressives and "even" National Liberals during the Reichstag campaign, "this prospect has moved into the distant future." If the Social Democratic Party did not split due to internal factionalism, "then one cannot foresee when and how the incalculable growth of this state within a state can ever be halted."<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> "Geschäftsberichte . . . KHMS Zwickau . . . 1911" (excerpt), SHStAD, Mdl 5392.

<sup>116</sup> AHM Meißen, "Geschäftsbericht . . . 1911" (excerpt) (25.2.12), *ibid.*

## OLD WINE, NEW BOTTLES

Looking ahead for a moment to note that 55 percent of Saxon voters cast a ballot for Social Democracy in January 1912, it is worth reminding ourselves what the principal parties in Saxony actually stood for (or claimed to).

They all ran on the programs their national leaders had issued in late 1911 as election manifestos, handbooks, pamphlets, placards, newspaper advertisements, and even—in unprecedented numbers—illustrated (color) posters and picture postcards.<sup>117</sup> The Conservatives offered mainly a negative message, promising to oppose any reduction of protective tariffs and to protect agriculture, the *Mittelstand*, and “national work” (meaning strike-breakers and others). They also swore to defend Germany against the “increasingly predatory terrorism” of Social Democrats and their *Helfershelfer*.<sup>118</sup> Conservatives signaled their willingness to consider new exceptional laws in the future and—as Mehnert hoped—to draw right-wing National Liberals to their side. The Catholic Center Party fielded only token candidates in Saxony (usually Matthias Erzberger). It defended the new taxes it helped pass in 1909, warned against a liberal renaissance, and of course defended religion. The National Liberals’ election program celebrated the accomplishments of the Bülow Bloc before 1909, attacked almost all the legislation passed by the Catholic-Conservative Black-Blue Bloc since then, and vigorously defended army increases, navy increases, and colonial policy. The party did not dare defame the existing Reichstag suffrage and the coalition rights of workers. But it promised to defend the “independence of the *Bürgertum*” from enemies left and right.

Fighting its first general election, the left-liberal Progressive People’s Party attacked the Conservatives and Center relentlessly and promised to help those hurt by the consumer taxes of 1909. Also defending citizens’ rights, the Progressives claimed that the Black-Blue Bloc “made the free exercise of the right to vote more difficult for the people” and called for a more equitable drawing of (Reichstag) constituency boundaries. But the Progressives also tried to draw a clear line between themselves and the SPD which, as a “class party, . . . recklessly sharpens economic conflicts.” Did the outcome of the election really turn on these program points? The Progressive Reichstag deputy Hermann Pachnicke suggested otherwise: “Oh, if only the politicians in the big cities knew or paid attention! [It is] not about Morocco, not about the rights of the Reichstag . . . , not about a great number of other things that are discussed in thousands of lede editorials, but rather, in the countryside—about the price of pigs.”<sup>119</sup>

The Social Democrats’ election manifesto was published in *Vorwärts* on 7 December 1911. It characterized the election as an opportunity to end “oppression

<sup>117</sup> See Bertram, *Wahlen*, 167–83; Grenquist, *Elections*, 87–106; Koch, *Volk*, 107–11.

<sup>118</sup> DKP election manifesto (*Wahlaufuf*) in KZ, 7.12.11; Saxon Cons. Wahlaufuf cited LNN, 6.12.11, DJ, 5.12.11. By 1911 the former general secretary of the Saxon Cons. State Association, Richard Kunze, had been co-opted by the national party. See Kunze, *Reichstagswähler*, esp. pt. 2, 226f. conflating the liberal and socialist threats.

<sup>119</sup> *VossZ*, 5.12.11, cited in Bertram, *Wahlen*, 172.

and exploitation.” It might also mean the difference between peace and war. Getting down to details, the SPD’s demands ran the gamut of myriad economic, social, political, and—no less important—electoral reforms.<sup>120</sup> They included: “democratization of the state and elimination of privilege; universal, equal, secret, direct vote for men and women; ministerial responsibility for the Reichstag; reform of the military establishment; judicial reform; protection of the rights of labor to organize; . . . improvement of government industrial inspection; an eight-hour working day; reform of workmen’s insurance with attention to farm labor and servants; reduction of the pension age from seventy to sixty-five; . . . religious freedom . . . ; universal free primary education; freedom of art and science; decreasing and final elimination of indirect taxes; . . . removal of food tariffs; reduction to a minimum of all restrictions on meat importation; abolition of industrial tariffs . . . ; graduated income, inheritance, and property taxes; . . . [and] cessation of foreign colonialism.” From this list, what most conspicuously set the SPD off from all other parties was its call for the complete elimination of indirect taxes and tariffs on food.

Although we should not overstress “modernity” as this campaign’s overriding characteristic, new campaign methods were deployed in 1912.<sup>121</sup> They included the unprecedented number and cost of party rallies;<sup>122</sup> the use of automobiles to allow candidates to speak at two or three rallies per day; immense quantities of printed matter distributed by all parties; increased use of boycotts by both sides against publicans, small businessmen, and others; and new roles for women. The National Liberal Eugen Schiffer viewed these innovations as a double-edged sword, as did most others on the Right. About the use of automobiles and the added speaking opportunities it offered, he wrote in the same disparaging tone that characterized other comments about the march of democracy: “Now, in the morning, [the candidate] has barely descended from the trapeze on which he has performed his gymnastics when he is packed into an auto and driven to another circus to present himself there, and then on the same evening he finds himself standing in the spotlight in a third town.” Physical exertion aside, the burden of routine was particularly oppressive: “The worst thing is the monstrous boredom that the candidate himself feels when he has to say the same thing again and again.”<sup>123</sup> Schiffer was not taken in by the number of election rallies each party claimed to have organized or their impact on voters. “The people go to all the meetings as though they were theater shows, they listen to the speaker, they applaud even when they hear completely contradictory statements, because it is

<sup>120</sup> *Vw*, 7.12.11, but presented here in Grenquist’s summary form (*Election*, 88f.). For the RT campaign in Leipzig, see flyers, press clippings, and administrators’ reports in StadtAL, AHMS Leipzig, Nr. 14, and StadtAL, Sammlung Vetter, Nr. 5, Nrn. 173–5.

<sup>121</sup> Griesmer, *Massenverbände*, argues persuasively that the radical nationalist associations had largely withdrawn from the 1912 campaign; Bertram, *Wahlen*, and Grenquist, *Elections*, reflect an older view.

<sup>122</sup> Constituency races cost an average of about 7,000 Marks per candidate, up from about 1,000 Marks in 1880; Bertram, *Wahlen*, 190–3.

<sup>123</sup> BAK, NL Schiffer, Nr. 1 (MS); Schiffer, *Leben*, 19f.

fun for them at last to hear a good speaker; but they reserve for themselves the right to vote as they please."<sup>124</sup>

The Reich Association Law of 1908 had made it legal for women to join political parties and associations, though no party besides the SPD yet advocated for women's suffrage rights. Luise Zietz published *Women and the Political Struggle* in 1911,<sup>125</sup> but the newness of women's influence on the voting behavior of their husbands, fathers, and sons should not be over-emphasized. As early as 1893, Minna Wettstein-Adelt, the author of *Three and a Half Months as Factory Worker*, had noted the importance of women to the political process: "Prevailing circumstances," she wrote, were already "driving girls toward Social Democracy; the day will come when a female worker means the same thing as a female Social Democrat." She continued: "Many mothers who [have] found the leisure in marriage to think about Social Democratic ideas" prefer to "dress their daughters in red, or when they [grow] older, let them wear red scarves or red bows on their hats."<sup>126</sup> (In the period 1909–14 the Saxon government agonized over what was permissible, for both men and women, when insignia, ribbons, banners, wreaths, marches, and protest songs conveyed Social Democratic sympathies.)<sup>127</sup> Social Democrats were better able to put women in the front lines than any other party in 1912: they distributed party literature to friends and neighbors, and they assisted, encouraged, or shamed apathetic male comrades to trek to the polling place. On 4 January 1912, in Berlin's eight Reichstag constituencies, twenty-six Social Democratic meetings were held at the same time, all with the same agenda: "Women and the Reichstag Election." According to *Vorwärts*, the SPD's "Women's Bureau" in Berlin provided female speakers for forty-eight campaign tours in 1911 alone.<sup>128</sup> The tangible effect of these efforts cannot be measured easily or precisely; but they cannot be discounted either.

#### "STRICTLY OBJECTIVE, COMPLETELY UNPOLITICAL"

On the first day of the new year (1912) Paul Mehnert wrote to Count Vitzthum asking for government assistance for the "parties of order."<sup>129</sup> Four days later the chairman of the Pan-German League's chapter in Dresden did the same on behalf of the United Dresden National Committees.<sup>130</sup> In both cases Vitzthum's government willingly put its hand on the scales of electoral fairness.

Mehnert painted an unrealistically black picture of how many Social Democrats would be elected across the Reich on the first ballot. "Without doubt," he wrote, that

<sup>124</sup> BAK, NL Schiffer, Nr. 1 (MS), cited in Bertram, *Wahlen*, 186, 189. Cf. Friedrich Naumann's similar complaint in *Freiheitskämpfe*, 267.

<sup>125</sup> Zietz, *Frauen*.

<sup>126</sup> Wettstein-Adelt, *3 1/2 Monate*, 72f.

<sup>127</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 11995 and 11410, *passim*.

<sup>128</sup> *Vw*, 4.1.12, *DTZ*, 12.1.12, and other sources cited in Bertram, *Wahlen*, 196–9.

<sup>129</sup> Mehnert to [Vitzthum], 1.1.12, and draft reply, 2.1.12; SHStAD, Mdl 5391.

<sup>130</sup> Friedrich Hopf (*Vereinigte Dresdner Nationale Ausschüsse*) to Saxon Gesamtministerium, 4.12.11, with accompanying marginalia and replies; flyer, "Was wollen die Nationalen Ausschüsse?," SHStAD, Mdl 5391.

number would be “60–70.” In fact only twenty-nine SPD candidates carried the day on 12 January. Mehnert claimed that the run-offs presented Saxony with “a great danger.” Therefore he submitted two requests “at the urging of others . . . [and] from all sides.” The first was that the run-off ballots be scheduled “*as far as possible before 25 January*.” This way the period during which the SPD could focus its agitation would be “as short as possible, to the benefit of the *bürgerlich* parties.” The second asked that run-off ballots in which Conservatives and Social Democrats faced each other take place two days earlier than those in which liberals and Social Democrats were competitors. Mehnert elaborated: “It is said—not without justification—that the liberals would then be more likely to hold back in run-offs between Conservatives and Social Democrats from voting for the latter than if the circumstances were reversed.” Mehnert claimed to be pessimistic about the chances of preventing Progressives from supporting socialists, but he expressed the thought in such a way—“hardly anything can be done, probably”—that he presented the Saxon government with a challenge. Mehnert’s inference was clear: Vitzthum should do everything he could to produce “good elections,” and if he did so, he would not be seen as partisan.

This scheduling of second ballots proved contentious throughout the Reich. Bethmann Hollweg’s government, after declaring that run-offs would be held on 20, 22, and 25 January, left it to the federal states to sort out their own dates.<sup>131</sup> The Progressives correctly charged that a general battle plan was in place. The first run-offs tended to pit the extreme Right (Conservatives) against the extreme Left (SPD), forcing the rubbery middle to bend one way or the other. When the last run-offs were held, often pitting liberals and Social Democrats against each other, Conservatives could decide whether to support the liberal candidate, abstain, or even support the Social Democrat.

An example from Saxony illustrates how this situation unfolded.

The district governor and chief returning officer in the constituency of 23: Plauen was Maximilian Mehnert, Paul’s younger brother. With a series of tortured arguments, Max Mehnert successfully scheduled the run-off involving the Progressive Party leader Oskar Günther for Monday, 22 January. All other Saxon run-offs (seven) were held the preceding Saturday, 20 January.<sup>132</sup> Conservatives persuaded the local National Liberal association to support a businessman and member of Plauen’s city council, Julius Graser. The goal was to force Günther into a run-off against a Social Democrat. Graser’s candidacy was not approved by the National Liberal leadership in Saxony, but they could not persuade their local followers to drop him.<sup>133</sup> This muddled the waters exactly as the Conservatives hoped (it also reflected tense relations between the two liberal parties).<sup>134</sup> Regional Governor Fraustadt was not happy that this “confusion” might lead to the election of a socialist. But he was powerless to prevent a three-way race on the first ballot.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> See Bertram, *Wahlen*, 241–6. On the 20th: 77; on the 22nd, 80; on the 25th, 34.

<sup>132</sup> AHM [Maximilian] Mehnert (Plauen) to MdI, 17/20.1.12, 28.2.12.

<sup>133</sup> *NLVB* 7 (20.3.12), 41f.

<sup>134</sup> See newspaper clippings in SHStAD, Außenministerium 1432,

<sup>135</sup> KHM Fraustadt (Zwickau) to MdI, 4.1.12; SHStAD, MdI 5391.



Table 13.1. Reichstag Election in 23: Plauen, January 1912

Party affiliation	Candidate, occupation, residence	Votes (no.)	Votes (%)
<b>Main Ballot (12 January 1912)</b>			
National Liberal	Julius Graser, industrialist, councilman, Plauen	10,070	23.5
Progressive	Oskar Günther, industrialist, assemblyman, Plauen	11,859	27.7
Social Democratic	Hermann Jäckel, journalist, textile union official, Berlin	20,857	48.7
Other		14	0.2
<b>Run-off Ballot (22 January 1912)</b>			
Progressive	Oskar Günther	21,406	47.1
Social Democratic	Hermann Jäckel (winner)	24,012	52.9
Spoiled ballots		286	

*Note:* Voter turnout on the main ballot was 85.5 percent, on the run-off ballot 91.1 percent. Both Graser and Günther were labeled *Fabrikant*; see Haunfelder, *Liberale Abgeordneten*, 167f., and *SParl*, 383f., on Günther's many commercial, social, and political connections.

*Source:* *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* 250 (1912): 1:52f.

As the run-off approached, potential National Liberal and Conservative supporters of Günther knew that the Progressives, on 20 January, had supported the SPD in many other run-offs in Saxony. Specifically, they had contributed to a Conservative defeat in 11: Oschatz-Grimma by advising their supporters to abstain. Progressives had perpetrated an even greater outrage (in Conservative eyes) when they counseled their followers to vote for the socialist in the run-off in 9: Freiberg. This led to the SPD's victory there.<sup>136</sup> The Conservatives took their revenge on Günther on 22 January mainly by staying home—something Max Mehnert had already anticipated when he wrote to the ministry of the interior on 17 January. Other Conservatives turned in spoiled ballots or voted for the socialist (see Table 13.1).

National Liberals were blamed for this stunning defeat of the man who almost personified left liberalism in Saxony. Günther had chaired the Saxon wing of the Progressive People's Party since it was founded in 1910. Before that he had kept the left-liberal banner aloft—if not quite flying high—as part of Paul Mehnert's Kartell. But the machinations of the brothers Mehnert were crucial to Günther's defeat. Saxon Progressives interpellated Vitzthum's government on this blatant chicanery. Nothing much came of it—at first.<sup>137</sup> Then, during acrimonious speaking duels on the floor of the Landtag on 13 February 1912, Vitzthum replied to the Progressives' interpellation. The motives ascribed to Maximilian Mehnert, he told the house, were simply untrue.<sup>138</sup> "There is no evidence whatsoever to support the assumption that the chief returning officer acted

<sup>136</sup> In 9: Freiberg, 311 spoiled ballots were cast in the run-off, suggesting that, when abstention was not an option, Progressives found another way to help the SPD candidate. His margin of victory was 116 votes.

<sup>137</sup> *LTAkten* 1911/12, II.K., Nr. 123 (18.1.12); quote taken from draft (n.d.) of Vitzthum's response, SHStAD, Mdl 5391.

<sup>138</sup> *LT Mitt* 1911/12, II.K., 2:1624–57; Hohenlohe, 19.2.12, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, Nr. 3, Bd. 26.

here on any grounds other than those that are *strictly objective* and *completely unpolitical*.”<sup>139</sup> The minister went further. In providing reasons for a later run-off ballot, Max Mehnert had argued that it would be difficult for farmers in this relatively large constituency to travel to their 230 polling places on a Saturday, when many of them would be attending market in Plauen. As he put it, the vote would not be genuinely representative of the constituency’s entire electorate if held on a Saturday. Vitzthum told the Progressives brusquely that “it is not only the chief returning officer’s right, but also his *duty*, to determine the date of the run-off election in *such* a way that *all* occupational groups, as far as possible, are able to exercise their voting right . . . by taking into consideration the *local circumstances in the constituency*.”<sup>140</sup>

In the name of Dresden’s “united nationalists,” the local Pan-German leader Friedrich Hopf asked the Saxon government for a different electoral advantage—one that anti-socialists elsewhere in the Reich also requested.<sup>141</sup> “Civil servants and other salaried employees of every kind,” he wrote, should be given full-day holidays on both election days—for the main and run-off ballots—in consideration of the “practical election help” they could offer. Hopf went further, suggesting that such employees also be given some free time for the same purpose in the weeks preceding each voting day. Hopf’s request fell on willing ears. “Before the last Reichstag election,” wrote a higher civil servant to one of his subordinates, “a decree was issued by the *Gesamtministerium* to all ministries. That could be repeated. I request [a] corresponding draft.”<sup>142</sup>

#### GUNNING FOR THE RUN-OFFS

After the main balloting was completed on 12 January 1912, the prospects for anti-socialist unity looked different in Saxony and the Reich.<sup>143</sup> Nationally, the two Conservative parties fared better than many doomsayers had predicted. But neither the Social Democrats nor the Progressives lived up to their leaders’ hopes. Table 13.2 illustrates the contrasting fortunes of the main parties in the first and second rounds.

After 12 January, the far Right and the far Left exemplified “friends” and “enemies” of the Reich. This situation had been predicted by August Bebel at the SPD’s Jena party congress in September 1911. He told his troops that it was their “damnable duty” to declare—“so to speak”—a “state of war” for the coming “election battle.” The upcoming struggle would be the “most important one we have ever

<sup>139</sup> Emphasis added. <sup>140</sup> Emphasis added here only on “duty.”

<sup>141</sup> See Salza und Lichtenau (Berlin) to Vitzthum (Dresden), 30.10.11, SHStAD, MdAA 1431; NAZ, 31.10.11; Bertram, *Wahlen*, 119–38.

<sup>142</sup> See also Max Schneider, on behalf of the *Wahlausschuß der vereinigten liberalen Parteien*, Bärenstein (Bezirk Chemnitz), to Mdl (copy), 4.1.12; SHStAD, Mdl 5391.

<sup>143</sup> See the stylized map showing party seats in the Reichstag shortly before the 1912 election, depicted according to size of constituency population: *Die Vertretung der Wahlkreise bei Schluß des Reichstags 1911*, from Walter Koch, *Volk und Staatsführung vor dem Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1935), back matter. See the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

Table 13.2. Reichstag Elections, Seats Won on Main and Run-off Ballots, 1907 and 1912

Party	Main ballot		Run-off ballot		Total seats	
	1907	1912	1907	1912	1907	1912
German Conservatives	43	27	17	16	60	43
Free Conservatives/Imperial Party	11	5	13	11	24	16
AS and Other Right-wing Groups	10	3	17	10	27	13
Bavarian Farmer's League (etc.)	1	1	0	3	1	4
National Liberals	21	4	37	41	58	45
Progressive People's Party	9	0	40	42	49	42
Poles	19	14	1	4	20	18
Alsace-Lorraine, Guelphs, Danes	10	9	5	6	15	15
German Center Party	86	79	14	12	100	91
Social Democrats	29	64	14	46	43	110
Total	239	206	158	191	397	397

Notes: By the end of 1911, SPD seats had increased to fifty-three due to by-election victories. For each party's opponents and success in the Jan. 1912 run-offs, see Bertram, *Wahlen*, 221.

Sources: Bertram, *Wahlen*, 215, 243f. Slightly different figures for smaller parties in RWA, 42.

fought . . . Every man to his post!"<sup>144</sup> However, Bebel also counseled his fellow party leaders to think carefully about their strategy for the run-off elections.

Bebel knew that, in the past, SPD voters had not followed instructions to abstain in certain run-off contests—for example, to allow a left-liberal victory. He described this situation with another martial metaphor. In spite of calls to abstain, "the masses run to the polls anyway . . . On election day, they act like cavalry horses when they hear the trumpets."<sup>145</sup> Bebel warned that the "parties of order" could be expected to raise a hue and cry against Social Democracy before the run-off ballots in 1912. "If the main ballot turns out well for us and if we receive a considerable increase in votes, then you will see a running of the hares—to the right—by the *bürgerlich* parties. (*Very true!*) A powerful fear will be instilled in them."<sup>146</sup> To illustrate the tactics Social Democrats could expect from their enemies, Bebel cited Kaiser Wilhelm's public address on 25 January 1907, which had celebrated the nationalists' election victory. Wilhelm had quoted the battle-hardened Prussian officer Obrist Kottwitz from Heinrich von Kleist's *Prinz von Homburg*. Bebel did the same: "Why should it matter to you what rule defeats an enemy / So long as that enemy is defeated, so long as he lays with all his banners at your feet. / The rule that destroys him is the only rule."<sup>147</sup> In response to such ruthlessness, Bebel reminded his listeners that the first question Social Democrats had to ask any non-socialist candidate seeking their help in a run-off was: "Do you support preservation of the existing [Reichstag] suffrage?"

The liberal parties faced a different run-off dilemma. Nationally, the National Liberals gravitated to the Right, though with great variations of motivation and

<sup>144</sup> SPD, *Parteitag . . . Jena . . . 1911*, 376–92, here 391f.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

success in different parts of the Reich. The party leadership absolved itself of responsibility in this situation by allowing regional party leaders to conclude their own run-off agreements with other parties.<sup>148</sup> The Saxon National Liberal leadership called loudly for a united front against the SPD, following what they termed “the law of national honor.”<sup>149</sup> The “many wounds” that Conservatives and liberals had inflicted on each other before the first ballot now had to be salved by the call to unity. An editorial in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* put it this way: “Love of Fatherland and a sense of nation must not be stifled by anger over this or that tax. Otherwise, what looked like gold turns out to be counterfeit, what was shouted out as truth in the marketplace is a lie.”

The left-liberal Progressive People's Party faced a different challenge. The number of seats it had won nationally on the main ballot was exactly zero. To save the party from extinction, its national leadership entered into a secret alliance with the Social Democrats. The latter would “dampen” their agitation in sixteen constituencies—none of them in Saxony—to help Progressives to victory. Conversely, the Progressives provided declared or undeclared support for Social Democrats in thirty-one other constituencies. The jury is still out on how much this agreement helped either party.<sup>150</sup> Factions within both of them entertained doubts about its wisdom. Rosa Luxemburg claimed that her face went red with shame when she learned about this agreement.<sup>151</sup> The Progressive Otto Wiemer and the socialist Wolfgang Heine also expressed doubts about its efficacy. Heine suggested retrospectively that it should have been arranged before the main election, not at the last minute.<sup>152</sup> Wiemer echoed Bebel's recognition that a party's voters cannot easily be commanded to the polls or away from them. As he told the Progressives' congress in 1912, it was not easy, “in the middle of a hard-fought election battle, to tell [party supporters] to break off the campaign shortly before the decision [is achieved]. That can be considered only with very well-trained and disciplined troops, but not with the broad mass of voters.”<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, this agreement—struck on 16 January in the Berlin residence of the Progressive bank director Karl Mommsen—was kept under wraps until just before the run-offs. Considering the number of people who were privy to the deal, this was a remarkable feat.

Even Bethmann Hollweg was taken by surprise. Because the number of SPD seats won on the first ballot had jumped from twenty-nine in 1907 to sixty-four in 1912, Bethmann could not resist desperate calls from the Right to help orchestrate a united front against Social Democracy for the run-offs. With the help of Chancellery Chief Wahnschaffe, Loebell, and Schwerin-Löwitz (among others), the chancellor tried to persuade the non-socialist parties to see the light before the run-offs took place.<sup>154</sup> The Leipzig Social Democrat Friedrich Stampfer got many details wrong, but he offered a lively account of the meeting convened on 17 January: “Good old Bethmann

<sup>148</sup> See Bertram, *Wahlen*, 223.

<sup>149</sup> *LNN*, 16.1.12.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Bertram, *Wahlen*, 230f.; Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 197f.

<sup>151</sup> Cited in Carsten, *Bebel*, 221.

<sup>152</sup> Cited in Bertram, *Wahlen*, 234.

<sup>153</sup> Cited *ibid.*, 232.

<sup>154</sup> See Bethmann to Schwerin-Löwitz, 17.1.12, cited in Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 91.

was so clueless that, even after the [Progressive–SPD] agreement had been concluded, he invited the leaders of all *bürgerlich* parties to a meeting in one of the Prussian Landtag's rooms. The agenda was: joint run-off campaign against Social Democracy. He was completely astounded when he found himself alone with only Conservatives and Centrists . . . One National Liberal opened the door to the negotiating room and was welcomed warmly; but he withdrew immediately, mumbling an apology. Two days later the run-off agreement was announced; the bomb had gone off."<sup>155</sup>

When the run-offs were completed, the outcome of 1907 had been reversed (see Table 13.3).

**Table 13.3.** Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1907 and 1912

	21 January 1907			12 January 1912		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
<b>Saxony</b>						
Conservatives	92,206	10.6	3	90,793	9.7	2
National Liberals	225,034	26.1	6	204,235	21.9	1
Left Liberals	44,405	5.2	2	81,718	8.7	0
Antisemites	59,678	6.9	3	37,160	4.0	1
Agrarian League, WV, etc.	18,548	2.1	1	3,424	0.4	0
Center	4,643	0.5	0	2,573	0.3	0
Social Democrats	418,570	48.5	8	513,216	55.0	19
Total votes cast/seats	866,571		23	938,135		23
Turnout rate (%)	89.7			88.8		
<b>Reich</b>						
German Conservatives	1,060,209	9.4	60	1,126,270	9.2	43
Free Conservatives	471,863	4.2	24	367,156	3.0	14
National Liberals	1,630,581	14.5	54	1,662,670	13.6	45
Left Liberals	1,233,933	10.9	49	1,497,041	12.3	42
Antisemites	94,869	0.8	16	51,898	0.4	3
Economic Union (WV) (1)	343,120	3.1	14	304,557	2.5	10
Center	2,179,743	19.4	105	1,996,843	16.4	91
Social Democrats	3,259,029	28.9	43	4,250,401	34.8	110
Total votes cast/seats	11,303,537		397	12,260,626		397
Turnout rate (%)	84.7			84.9		

*Notes:* Percentages for main ballot only. Total votes cast includes valid and invalid ballots. RT caucus totals include "guests" (*Hospitanten* and *nicht zur Fraktion*). (1) Under Economic Union in 1912 (Reich) are included the following parties and votes: Christian Social, 101,822; Economic Union: 96,346; Agrarian League: 58,998; and German Social, 47,391. Smaller parties are grouped differently than in Table 13.2. For a more complete overview, see the tables prepared by Valentin Schröder at <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/krtw.htm>.

*Sources:* "Statistik der Reichstagswahlen von 1907," *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutsche Reichs*, Ergänzungsheft zu 1907, Heft I (1907): 44–7, 66–9, Heft III, Zweiter Teil (1907): 8–9, 121–4; *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* 250 (1912), Heft I: 49–53, 72–3, 76–7.

<sup>155</sup> Stampfer, *Erfahrungen*, 162. For more accurate accounts—it was apparently the Progressive Otto Wiener who left hurriedly—see Koch, *Volk*, 119; Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 196–8.

Table 13.4. Reichstag Elections in Saxony, by Constituency and Party, 1912

Constituency	Liberal "Pact" (1911)	Cons/BdL/ Reform/ WVgg.	Progressive Peoples Party (FoVP)	National Liberals (NLP)	Social Democrats (SPD)	Party of Winner	
						Main Ballot	Run-off Ballot
1: Zittau	no	7.1	22.0	17.3	50.6	SPD	
2: Löbau	no	14.5	13.6	22.8	49.0		SPD
3: Bautzen	FoVP	40.9	24.2	—	34.9		Reform
4: Dresden-New City	FoVP	23.9	21.2	—	54.3	SPD	
5: Dresden-Old City	no	—	—	49.4	49.2		SPD
6: Dresden-County	NLP	13.8	—	26.6	59.2	SPD	
7: Meißen	no	29.6	18.9	—	51.1	SPD	
8: Pirna	NLP	22.7	—	25.3	51.9	SPD	
9: Freiberg	NLP	28.8	—	26.1	46.1		SPD
10: Döbeln	NLP	19.9	—	27.3	52.8	SPD	
11: Oschatz-Grimma	FoVP	39.6	17.4	—	43.0		Cons
12: Leipzig-City	NLP	—	—	46.3	44.6		NLP
13: Leipzig-County	no	7.4	7.7	20.4	64.4	SPD	
14: Borna	NLP	28.1	—	27.6	44.3		Cons
15: Mittweida	no	9.3	11.4	20.5	58.8	SPD	
16: Chemnitz	NLP	10.5	—	25.2	64.1	SPD	
17: Glauchau-Meerane	no	10.6	25.8	—	63.6	SPD	
18: Zwickau	NLP	—	—	39.1	60.6	SPD	
19: Stollberg	no	29.8	6.1	—	64.1	SPD	
20: Marienberg	FoVP	18.6	25.3	—	56.1	SPD	
21: Annaberg	NLP	3.8	—	42.6	53.6	SPD	
22: Auerbach	no	—	0.2	43.8	55.9	SPD	
23: Plauen	FoVP	—	27.7	23.5	48.7		SPD
Total Saxony		14.1	8.7	21.9	55.0	15	8

Note: Non-SPD winners: 3: Heinrich Gräfe; 11: Dr. Ernst Giese; 12: Dr. Johannes Junck; 14: General Eduard Liebert (protested, cashiered).

Sources: *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* 250 (1912–13), Hefte I-III; RHRT, 2:1120–97.

All major parties and party groupings in 1912, with two exceptions, suffered losses. The first exception was the Progressive People's Party. Its share of the popular vote rose in both Saxony and the Reich over liberals' share in 1907. But the size of the party's caucus shrank—both nationally and regionally. In Saxony, the two seats Progressives had won in 1907 were lost in 1912. The second exception was the SPD, whose gains drew the lion's share of commentary. Whether it was called a recovery, a rebound, or a rebuff to the established order, Social Democracy's showing in 1912 was stunning. The number of votes cast for its candidates rose from about 3.3 million in 1907 to almost 4.3 million. Its share of the popular vote rose from about 29 percent in 1907 to about 35 percent. Thus

more than one in three German voters in 1912 opted for the “party of revolution.” And its number of seats in the Reichstag rocketed to 110—the largest caucus in the national parliament. Only the size of the Center Party’s caucus (ninety-one) came anywhere close.

In Saxony, neither the agreement between Progressives and National Liberals nor attempts to rally the vestiges of an anti-socialist Kartell amounted to much. Social Democrats were able to win fifteen of the kingdom’s Reichstag mandates right away on 12 January. Of the eight run-off ballots required, opponents of Social Democracy won only four (see Table 13.4).

Saxon voters were represented in Berlin after 1912 by nineteen Social Democrats, one antisemitic Reformer (Heinrich Gräfe), one German Conservative (Ernst Giese), one Free Conservative (Eduard von Liebert), and one National Liberal (Johannes Junck). A large and contiguous bastion of Social Democratic strength lay in Saxony’s industrial southwest (constituencies 15: Mittweida through 22: Auerbach).<sup>156</sup> In those eight constituencies, Social Democratic candidates garnered, on average, 59.6 percent of the popular vote on the first ballot.

## LICKING WOUNDS

Our enemies won’t defenselessly let the water rise above their necks.

—August Bebel to Austrian Social Democratic leader Victor Adler,  
12 January 1912<sup>157</sup>

Monarchy is like a splendid ship, with all sails set as it moves majestically on, but then it hits a rock and sinks forever. Democracy is like a raft. It never sinks but, damn it, your feet are always in water.

—attributed to Fisher Ames, Federalist leader, speaking in the  
US House of Representatives, 1795<sup>158</sup>

A few anti-socialists in Saxony voiced satisfaction that nineteen Saxon SPD deputies in the Reichstag after 1912 was better than twenty-two (as in 1903). But their voices were drowned out by those for whom the sky was falling (or the water rising).<sup>159</sup> The latter focused their complaints on SPD “terrorism” and on the lack of anti-socialist unity. These complaints were expressed loudly and often in Saxony, even though the bare facts spoke for themselves—or seemed to. Between 1907 and 1912, the number of votes won by the Saxon SPD rose from about 419,000 to over

<sup>156</sup> See maps showing Reichstag elections in Saxony, 1912, and party bastions in Saxony, 1912, both in the Online Supplement: <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca/>.

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Groh, *Integration*, 288.

<sup>158</sup> Cited (n.d.) in Crick, *Democracy*, 51.

<sup>159</sup> See unsigned letter headed “Why did the elections turn out so badly?” addressed to Vitzthum, 13.1.12; SHStAD, Mdl 5392.

513,000. The party's share of votes cast rose from 48.5 percent to 55.0 percent—every second voter supported the SPD, just as in the Landtag election of October 1909. And Social Democracy more than doubled its number of Saxon seats over 1907. Contemporaries were especially concerned about the SPD's rising membership in Saxony. Yet that rise was partly offset by negative indicators that worried socialists themselves. The image of unstoppable SPD growth was only part of a larger picture.

## REACTIONS

One problem for the SPD was the persistence of internal disputes within the national party and many of its regional organizations. Now within a year and a half of his death and unable to participate in the election campaign due to his daughter Frieda's mental illness, August Bebel saw the numerical increase of SPD Reichstag deputies as a two-edged sword. With "so motley a company" he knew it would be difficult to maintain either doctrinal purity or good relations among the party's right, left, and center factions. Although he took satisfaction from the party's gains, Bebel was worried about the future. On the day of the main ballot, he expressed fears of a backlash.<sup>160</sup> After the run-offs, the problem of party unity came to the fore. "The 110 are quite enough for me . . . If still another run-off election had been in the offing, I would have prayed: O, Lord! Desist with your blessings!"<sup>161</sup>

In Saxony, Bebel's worries were compounded by slowing growth in the number of subscribers to the SPD press, by the fact that the party rallied 120,000 fewer voters to the polls in 1912 than for the Landtag elections of 1909, and by evidence that it might have nearly exhausted its potential of working-class voters.<sup>162</sup> By the time the Saxon SPD held its annual congress in 1913, Karl Sindermann put the best face he could on this "stagnation crisis." The Saxon party had already begun an "immense effort" to win more members and readers—with mixed success. It resurrected talk of the mass strike and organized an impressive *Rote Woche*. But it drew back from plans to launch a concerted attack on Saxony's anti-democratic municipal suffrages.<sup>163</sup> Landtag deputy Emil Nietzsche noted that such a reform movement might provide an opportunity—which we know Conservatives were seeking—to revise the 1909 Landtag suffrage in an anti-socialist direction. Saxon SPD leaders used the lack of reform in

<sup>160</sup> Bebel to Adler, 12.1.12, cited previously.

<sup>161</sup> "Motley company" and "110" in letters to Victor Adler and Luise Kautsky, cited (n.d.) in Maehl, *Bebel*, 488.

<sup>162</sup> The SPD's statistician *Akademikus* in *NZ* 30, H. 48–9 (1911/12), 2:817–25, 868–73; cf. inter alia Groh, *Integration*, 278–89, esp. 280f. with telling Saxon examples; Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 52–85, esp. 83–5 for the following. Dobson, *Authority*, 66–100, is impressionistic.

<sup>163</sup> On the Saxon *Gemeindewahlrechtskongreß* (8.9.13), Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 84.



Prussia as a reason to preserve what had been achieved and to wait for new opportunities.

In the Reich, left liberals initially chose to defend, not challenge, the Reichstag majority created in January 1912.<sup>164</sup> Gradually they began to explore ways to forge alliances with the SPD and the National Liberals. Their south-German leader Friedrich von Payer saw practical difficulties. In June 1913 he wrote that since Rosa Luxemburg had spoken up for the radical left wing of her party, “the Social Democrats have been behaving like *Lausbuben*.”<sup>165</sup> There were reasons for optimism. The survival of Bassermann’s authority within the National Liberal party, though tenuous, added to the likelihood that both liberal parties would resist plans for a coup d’état or any other siren call from the Right. On the other hand, Saxon Progressives were the target of such venom from Conservatives and the Saxon government after January 1912 that they could not entertain alliances with the SPD, such as had become routine in southern Germany. One might think the Saxon Progressives had nothing to lose, having won no seats in 1912. They were under pressure to show their nationalist credentials, however. Alfred Brodauf—the Progressive candidate in 20: Marienberg in 1912—declared that the SPD “is and remains the deadly enemy of bourgeois society.” When this claim set off a chorus of rebuttals from Progressives elsewhere in the Reich, it illustrated how little room to maneuver the Saxon wing of the party enjoyed.<sup>166</sup>

Saxon Progressives concluded an electoral agreement *not* with the SPD—as was increasingly the norm in the Reich—but with the National Liberals. This pact was specifically for only the main ballot, not the run-offs, in the next Landtag elections scheduled for 1915. When it became public in the first week of July 1914, it landed as a bombshell in the SPD and Conservative camps. According to its terms, sixty-three Landtag constituencies were allocated to the National Liberals and twenty-eight to the Progressives. The latter had negotiated from a position of weakness. Now they faced the possibility in 1915 that National Liberals would profit from cooperation on the main ballot and the SPD would benefit in the run-offs.

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After the last general elections in the Reich (1912) and in Saxony (1909) were over, the two kinds of election battles considered in this book did not fade from view. In a half-dozen ways, they continued to shape Germany’s electoral culture.

First of all, opportunities to forge majorities in the Reichstag or another parliamentary body were narrowed or widened through by-elections, defections from one party to another, real or feared splits among party factions, and political alliances both inside and outside parliament. Those majorities determined the viability of

<sup>164</sup> See Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 200–35.

<sup>165</sup> Jackasses, louts, rascals, or, in Thompson’s translation, little yobs. Payer to Alwine von Payer, 29.6.13, cited *ibid.*, 204.

<sup>166</sup> Brodauf (1914) cited in Thompson, *Left Liberals*, 212.

each piece of legislation brought before Germany's representative institutions at the national, regional, and local levels. Second, Prussia's three-class suffrage remained a symbol of political stasis and Junker domination. Prussia's suffrage was "the most powerful bulwark of reaction in Europe."<sup>167</sup> Third, as election pacts were made for future elections and new recruits were mobilized, all parties (with their attendant interest groups) took their own pulse to measure faster or slower growth in membership. Such practices ensured that the prospect of future elections simmered just beneath the surface of political activity. Fourth, Landtag elections and suffrage reforms in other German states did not cease. In Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg, the SPD experienced election setbacks. In the Thuringian states, parliamentary suffrages were revised in an anti-democratic direction: this was described as "small-state Prussification."<sup>168</sup> Fifth, the idea of a leftist bloc continued to percolate. Writing in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Wilhelm Kolb was too optimistic when he declared that the *Großblock* idea "is not dead: it *lives* and *marches*." But he was trying to persuade his own party leaders that the Grand Bloc might still "storm across even the black-white frontier posts [of Prussia] and show itself to the Prussian comrades . . . as their last salvation from political misery."<sup>169</sup>

Lastly, by 1913 most constitutional experts in Germany had come to the conclusion that their political system represented something close to the right balance between constitutionalism and monarchy. Parliamentarism receded as a goal because the Reichstag had not asserted its potential position of power. The tepid opposition offered by Reichstag deputies to monarchical scandals, as in the *Daily Telegraph* Affair, and to military arrogance, as in the Zabern Affair,<sup>170</sup> provided evidence of this failure. That in turn made it easier for cautious politicians to associate parliamentarism, however paradoxically, with weak administration and a too-powerful state. In the press and on the floor of the Reichstag, deputies regularly referred to deficient constitutional models offered by other states. By 1914, expressions of national pride inferred a belief in Germany's constitutional superiority: "France was seen as a clear warning against parliamentarism, Britain as an ambiguous advertisement for it."<sup>171</sup>

This opinion was not universally shared, of course, but the outline of a consensus had emerged. Max Weber spoke for other German burghers who believed that Germany's semi-parliamentary system had not produced the first-class minds and competent leaders the nation needed. Samuel Saenger, who contributed to *Die Nation*, *Die Zukunft*, and other liberal journals, wrote in 1908 that, "in Germany, the place where politics is made has become the place where creative intelligence is hardest to find."<sup>172</sup> However, the liberal Lothar Schücking also represented bourgeois opinion. In 1908 he had written that "We could be more liberal if we had no

<sup>167</sup> Groh, *Integration*, 464. <sup>168</sup> NZ 32 (1913/14), 2:585ff., cited in Groh, *Integration*, 476.

<sup>169</sup> SM 19, H. 23 (1913): 1478–86, here 1486. <sup>170</sup> See Schoenbaum, *Zabern*.

<sup>171</sup> Hewitson, *Identity*, 243–59, at 248; also Schönberger, *Parlament*.

<sup>172</sup> *Neue Rundschau* 19 (1908): 167, cited in Trommler, *Kulturmacht*, 51; vom Bruch, *Bürgerlichkeit*, 390.

Social Democrats.”<sup>173</sup> Five years later, he felt that Germany’s constitutional system, even with Wilhelm II at its summit, was worth defending in a democratizing age: “The monarchy is something concrete. The republic is something colorless, constructed without flesh and bone, an abstraction. The monarchical ideal has something magical about it . . . [whereas] the republic is something cleverly devised, premised on foundational laws, constitutions, suffrages, etc.”<sup>174</sup>

The question that had seemed so urgent in 1906–09—Would Saxony mimic south-German models of tolerance toward Social Democracy, or would it hue to the Prussian line?—had largely been answered. Saxony was part of Germany’s north and east. It would protect its traditional rights and prerogatives no less fiercely than other federal states, but in politics, in class relationships, and in the administration of justice, it would follow Prussia’s lead. It could not do so with complete fealty: compared to the SPD’s share (55 percent) of the popular vote in Saxony in 1912, the Prussian SPD won “only” 32 percent. This put Social Democracy’s success in Prussia roughly on a par with its share of the vote in Bavaria (27 percent), Württemberg (33), Baden (28), and Hessen (39). The two Mecklenburg grand duchies reflected the SPD’s ability to make headway in reactionary but mainly rural polities: the SPD won 37 percent of the vote in Mecklenburg-Schwerin and 31 percent in Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Braunschweig (49 percent) represented a middle case. The city-states of Lübeck (53 percent), Bremen (53), and Hamburg (61) showed Social Democracy’s strength in exclusively urban environments. But the total population of these three cities (1.4 million) was much smaller than Saxony’s (4.8 million). As Germany’s third-largest state and roughly twice as populous as the fourth (Württemberg), Saxony was still peculiar and important. If the Saxon king, his government, and the non-socialist parties proved willing and able to uphold some of Prussia’s anti-democratic traditions—let alone most of them—this would be big news.

The outcome of Reichstag voting in January 1912 had troubled the sovereigns and leaders of every federal state. Some felt the monarchical principle no longer produced “good” elections. Grand Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, referring to Saxon King Friedrich August III, exclaimed to the Saxon envoy: “What use has your king’s popularity been now!” Turning to diplomatic representatives of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the grand duke continued: “and your duke and the duchess, who are just as much loved, could not change the fact that in Gotha a Social Democrat was elected.” The grand duke was downtrodden: “I try my best to work for my country [*Land*], and I will probably have to see the day when 3 Social Democrats are sent to the Reichstag from the grand duchy. Even we princes cannot hold back the [SPD] movement any longer.”<sup>175</sup> German monarchs—and monarchists—expressed even more outrage two years later, on 20 May 1914,

<sup>173</sup> Schücking, *Reaktion*, 16f.

<sup>174</sup> *März* 7 (1913): 200, cited in Trommler, *Kulturmacht*, 79.

<sup>175</sup> Baron Werner von Reitzenstein (Weimar) to Vitzthum (Dresden), 17.1.12, also 23.1.12, SHStAD, MdAA 1431. For corresponding views reported from Stuttgart and Munich, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, No. 3, Bd. 25.

when the SPD Reichstag caucus refused to rise from their seats for the customary *Hail!* to the Kaiser. Reformists and revisionists within the SPD saw this as an error of judgment. Only "Bebel's death [in 1913] made this dumb tactic possible," grumbled Hermann Molkenbuhr.<sup>176</sup> True to his name, Ludwig Frank was just as forthright: the SPD's "revolutionary energy has moved from [its] heads to the opposite parts of the body."<sup>177</sup> But Social Democratic lethargy was not the impression this provocation left on those already inclined to launch a strike against the movement. This *Sitzenbleiben* was followed just six days later by street protests in Prussia against the three-class suffrage. Now the Center and National Liberal press joined the Conservatives in depicting this "national misbehavior" as an excuse to declare war on the Reichstag.<sup>178</sup> The SPD's tactical error and the response of the Right encouraged Bethmann to believe that new Reichstag elections—which the radical Right had been calling for since the polls closed in January 1912—might produce a favorable outcome after all.<sup>179</sup> Perhaps the democratic tide had crested.

#### SAXONY IN THE REICH

In Saxony, the SPD's near-sweep in January 1912 had touched a raw nerve and embarrassed the government. The Social Democrats' robust showing had made a particularly strong impression at the royal court because King Friedrich August had "never made a secret of his energetic, fierce aversion to Social Democracy and to the Progressive-radical politicians who stand close to it."<sup>180</sup> The Austrian envoy Count Johann Forgách listed reasons for the SPD's success in Saxony, which were "probably the same as in all of northern Germany": the "tight, terroristic organization of the party among factory-workers and other workers, the general dissatisfaction of the middle ranks with the authoritarian conservative regime, which is cut to the cloth of the ruling classes, and finally the rise of the cost of living, strongly felt among the less affluent classes." Yet again, Saxony's left liberals bore much of the blame. "The bellowing of the Progressive-radical press, drunk with a spirit of dissolution, unsettle[d] the followers of the liberal parties primarily and led these into the arms of the movements standing farthest to the left." Count Forgách emphasized that in Saxony, contrary to common belief, dissatisfaction with foreign policy and with the Morocco negotiations did *not* affect the elections unfavorably. On the contrary: foreign policy had awakened the interest of the national movement in January 1912. Hatred of England and fear of a possible war had "motivated some segments of the middle classes—which otherwise would have voted for the extreme left out of general dissatisfaction—to give their votes to the state-supporting parties in order to increase the armed forces."

<sup>176</sup> Diary entry cited in Groh, *Integration*, 543. Cf. *BTbl*, 10.6.14, *Neue Korrespondenz*, 18.6.14 (with Kaiser's marginalia), PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82, No. 1, No. 1, Geheim, Bd. 8.

<sup>177</sup> Letter to Georg von Vollmar, 5.2.14, cited in Groh, *Integration*, 544.

<sup>178</sup> Press review in Groh, *Integration*, 547f.

<sup>179</sup> Bavarian envoy to Prussia, Count Hugo von und zu Lerchenfeld auf Köfering und Schönberg (Berlin), to Bavarian FO, 4.6.14, cited in Groh, *Integration*, 548.

<sup>180</sup> For this and the following, Forgách, 16.1.12, HHStAV, PAV/54.

We have already surveyed the domestic political scene in Saxony from 1909 to 1914. Given that the Saxon government's School Bill was introduced into the Landtag in February 1912, its final rejection almost two years later reflected the chasm between Conservatives and both liberal parties that had opened up during the Reichstag election campaign. Saxon Conservatives in 1913 went on the warpath again. Now from his seat in the Landtag's upper chamber, Mehnert "made himself available as leader" for a two-pronged attack, hoping—as he had in mid-1911—to move National Liberals to the right.<sup>181</sup> The first line of attack sought nothing less than to reverse the decision of 1909 for a plural Landtag suffrage. The second sought to recruit right-wing National Liberals for an assault against "socialist terror among the working classes" and against various taxes. The latter included the military levy and the capital gains tax that dominated Reichstag debates in 1913. Saxon Conservatives tarred these taxes with an anti-democratic brush: they represented a "shocking increase" in the "burdens placed on the propertied classes." They also reflected the Reich government's "conscious preferment of the masses."

Neither line of attack plucked Saxon Conservatives out of the political muddle that prevailed through the winter of 1913/14. Relations between the National Liberal and Conservative parties was described as moderately good—except that the Conservatives yearned for the old Saxon Kartell and the National Liberals did not want to burn their bridges with the Progressives. Saxon Conservatives were also willing to embrace reactionary causes more openly. One of these was the *Preußen-Tag*—the first congress of the Prussian League.<sup>182</sup> More generally they supported their Berlin colleagues' attacks "against the Reichstag, the Reichstag suffrage, and the growing democratization of the Reich." In January 1914, a reactionary conservative member of the Prussian Herrenhaus, Count Heinrich Yorck von Wartenburg, tabled a motion that was rightly taken as a vote of no-confidence against Bethmann Hollweg. The chancellor was allegedly incapable of defending Prussia against the threat of "centralizing democracy."<sup>183</sup> The radical agrarian Oldenburg-Januschau had put his own spin on the issue when he declared that Prussia's three-class suffrage should function as a kind of upper house of parliament for the Reich.<sup>184</sup> By quietly endorsing their oppositional Prussian comrades and by seconding their view that Bethmann's government was leading Germany to disaster, the Saxon Conservatives were moving closer to conspiracies entertained by the radical nationalist Right. As one observer put it, they "welcome the common bond of the [Prussian League] movement and they take in stride what divides them with a shrug of the shoulders."<sup>185</sup>

In the spring of 1914, new developments poisoned relations between the two biggest parties in the Saxon Landtag. Again they unfolded in the sphere of electoral politics. The first controversy arose around the National Liberals' last push to reform Saxony's upper chamber. The Conservatives wanted no part of such reform.

<sup>181</sup> Montgelas, 10.7.13 and, for the following about the *Preußenbund*, 12.12.13, 31.1.14 (all drafts); BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 971–2.

<sup>182</sup> See the article on the *Preußenbund* in *Lexikon*, vol. 3.

<sup>183</sup> Yorck's speech of 10.1.14 and Bethmann's reply, cited in Groh, *Integration*, 528n249.

<sup>184</sup> *KorrBdL*, 18.2.13, cited in KDWR, 571.

<sup>185</sup> Montgelas, 31.1.14 (draft), BHStAM II, Ges. Dresden 972.

The second development was a swirl of allegations about collusion between Progressives and National Liberals in March 1914, when the SPD scored a by-election victory over General Eduard von Liebert in 14: Borna. (Liebert's election in 1912 had been cashiered.)<sup>186</sup> The Conservatives claimed that both liberal parties deserted their general. The National Liberals saw things differently. Only "moderate liberal candidacies," they declared, held any possibility of recapturing the seat from the socialists in the future. Such arguments did not convince Saxon Conservatives, who sent an outraged letter to the Saxon state ministry in Dresden. "Political relations among the *bürgerlich* parties in our Fatherland Saxony," it stated, "have experienced an extraordinary crisis." With "utter clarity" the Reichstag election in Borna had demonstrated "that the fissure among non-Social Democratic elements, as a result of boundless agitation, has grown so deep, that more than 40% of liberal voters abstained." The following paragraphs vented the Conservatives' resentment at having been the target of liberal attacks for five years. They concluded with the hope that the *Bürgertum's* "inner turmoil" could be overcome by "patriotic men" who realized the urgency of banding together against such liberal "calumnies."

The third bone of contention was the most divisive one: the Progressive–National Liberal pact dividing up Saxon constituencies for the Landtag elections in 1915. Having heard hints that such an agreement was in the offing, the Austrian and Bavarian envoys ascribed blame to the party of Stresemann and Bassermann, just as they had in 1909 and 1912. "Ambitious liberals, parliamentarians, and rich National Liberal industrialists . . . want, with all means at their disposal, to take the place of the nobility. They feel themselves, correctly, to be materially superior, and beyond that culturally as well. They see it as unacceptable that this superiority has not yet been acknowledged in all quarters." These and other observers saw the dangerous possibility of an oppositional left-wing phalanx in the Landtag after 1915, when the liberals and Social Democrats together might command a two-thirds majority.

### SUFFRAGE REFORM: RIGHT, HALF TURN!

In private conversations, no experienced politician from the right-wing National Liberals to the German Conservatives, including the non-democratic Center people, defends the present [Reichstag] suffrage; they all recognize its elimination as absolutely necessary . . . Mind you, only in confidential conversations: before their voters, things sound different, because keeping an eye on their parliamentary seat gives them "forked tongues," as the Indians used to say.

—Daniel Frymann [pseudonym for Heinrich Claß],  
*If I Were the Kaiser* (March 1912)<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> See KHM Curt von Burgsdorff (Leipzig) to Mdl, 18.12.11, 4.1.12, and other reports in SHStAD, Mdl 5391–92.

<sup>187</sup> [Claß], *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär*, 52. This passage is in italics in the original.

I often think it's comical / How nature always does contrive  
 That every boy and every gal / That's born into the world alive  
 Is either a little Liberal, / Or else a little Conservative!

—W. S. Gilbert, lyric to Gilbert & Sullivan's *Iolanthe*

When considering their own ability to stop the advance of Social Democracy, after January 1912 the “parties of order” in Saxony didn’t see the glass half-full or half-empty. It was drained to the dregs.

Like the SPD, they viewed election and membership numbers as massively important. These figures didn’t lie.<sup>188</sup> But anti-socialists now painted a broader, darker picture that bare statistics could not adequately convey. It connected the dots between developments that begged an adequate response: rising SPD “terrorism” during election campaigns, the party’s increasingly successful recruitment of *Mittelständler* and rural voters, the inability of non-socialist parties to unite even in times of crisis, and the declining reputation of the Reichstag. The latter was now too “democratic” and thus dysfunctional. In Dresden one heard that the election campaign of 1912 would end “at Philippi.” It was “already imperative” to ensure that the next Reichstag elections, scheduled for 1917, “do not again lead to the shores of the Red Sea.”<sup>189</sup>

As the possibility of world war loomed, the “reds” and the Jews looked more dangerous than ever before. Social Democracy’s enemies saw Germany’s social and political democratization, in combination, as undermining Germany’s international standing, economic interests, and social stability. These *Schwarzseer* wanted to see the Reichstag suffrage revised in an antidemocratic direction. After January 1912, their demands grew more strident, as scholars have long known. What has not been recognized is that Saxony’s plural suffrage of 1909 provided a template for many of them.

## PRUSSIA

As the suffrage reform discourse in Saxony revealed, liberals wanted to do away with three-class suffrages because they were a symbol of agrarian domination and an instrument of conservative power.<sup>190</sup> The failed attempt to reform three-class voting in Prussia doubly disappointed German liberals in 1910. They now saw the authoritarian state as unwilling to embrace safe, sensible reform, while Social Democrats remained “scoundrels without a Fatherland.” This situation pleased some right-wing National Liberals, but it displeased liberals who clung to the Enlightenment ideal of a classless society.

In 1912, Prussian Interior Minister Hans von Dallwitz commissioned a study of suffrage reforms undertaken in Germany’s federal states outside Prussia. He told his

<sup>188</sup> Saxon SPD membership increased from about 89,000 in 1906/07 to 178,000 in 1913/14. Passage of the Reich Association Law allowed the number of female members to rise even faster, from about 6,000 in 1907/1908 to almost 29,000 (16 percent) in 1913/14. See figures in ch. 12.

<sup>189</sup> As reported by acting Prussian envoy Baron H. Welczek (Dresden) to Pr. FO, 31.1.12, PAAAB, Deutschland 125, Nr. 3, Bd. 25.

<sup>190</sup> KDWR, 494–5.

fellow ministers that not one of those states had witnessed a falling-off of support for Social Democracy in Reichstag elections after they reformed their own suffrage. This was a powerful argument for members of the Right who feared Prussia's "democratic encirclement" from the south and west. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg meanwhile drew the right conclusion from Prussia's suffrage reform debacle. Although its effect on the Reichstag could not be predicted, the "gulf between Conservatives and the National Liberals will grow wider in the future and the latter will be forced further to the left."<sup>191</sup> When the Prussian suffrage bill was withdrawn in May 1910, one left-liberal deputy expressed astonishment at "the strange burial which we celebrate today." He continued: "At the open grave you gentlemen quarrel about whose child it was and who committed the murder. But my political friends will not shed one tear for it."<sup>192</sup> Other liberals were confident that a new attempt at Prussian suffrage reform would be made in the future. Baroness von Spitzemberg noted that the liberals would be unrelenting in demanding reform "and, indeed, in an even more liberal form."<sup>193</sup>

The baroness was mistaken. Enthusiasm for suffrage reform waned—not only on government benches but among the German bourgeoisie. When Interior Minister Dallwitz accepted his ministerial appointment in the summer of 1910, he demanded (and got) the explicit promise that no new suffrage bill would be introduced on his watch.<sup>194</sup> When Dallwitz left office in April 1914, his successor was the Conservative Party insider and former chancellery chief, Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell. He too was determined not to be a "suffrage minister." When Loebell's appointment was still pending, one of the Kaiser's sons, Crown Prince Wilhelm, made it clear to his father that he must not appoint anyone "who might favor a reform of the Prussian voting system. What a disaster that would be..." The Kaiser had no intention of doing so. In any case, one of his advisors assured him that Loebell would not spring any "electoral-law surprises" on his king.<sup>195</sup> As Wilhelm II proclaimed after the Reichstag elections of January 1912, "I am too good a Prussian to let myself be strangled by this democratic Reichstag!"<sup>196</sup> Bethmann Hollweg was more ambivalent: "It is not easy in Germany to yield sufficiently but carefully enough to the pressure for democratic reform... The problem remains unclear and dangerous."<sup>197</sup>

By 1913 even grudging reform was no longer an option. Conservatives stood behind the anti-socialist and antisemitic viewpoint expressed by the Prussian Landtag

<sup>191</sup> Excerpts from PrStMin meeting of 26.5.10, AB-PrStMin, 10:59; Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 77–8; KDWR, 569.

<sup>192</sup> Progressive MdPAH Otto Fischbeck, 27.5.10, cited in Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 79.

<sup>193</sup> Spitzemberg, *Tagebuch*, 522 (30.5.10).

<sup>194</sup> Bethmann Hollweg to Delbrück, 3.9.10, cited in Zmarzlik, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 46–7.

<sup>195</sup> Arnold Wahnschaffe's comment cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3:977–8; on Dallwitz, his 1912 *Denkschrift*, and the state ministry's (and Wilhelm's) refusal to consider a new suffrage bill, see meetings of 21.10.10, 30.6.11, 20.4.12, and 31.12.13, AB-PrStMin, 10:62–104 passim; KDWR, 573; Vietsch, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 105–12.

<sup>196</sup> Cited in Zmarzlik, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 70, and Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3:964. Cf. Rudolf von Valentini to Bethmann, 2.5.12 (draft), cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3:967.

<sup>197</sup> Cited in Jarausch, *Chancellor*, 79.



deputy Hermann von Dewitz: "The more democratic a suffrage is, the greater the power of money and demagogues, which has exceeded all bounds."<sup>198</sup> In growing numbers, right-wing National Liberals agreed. In the *Nationalliberale Blätter*, Eugen Schiffer put it this way: "For us, the boundary line between liberalism and democracy is a firm line that we do not want to see blurred. When it comes down to it, liberalism has aristocratic tendencies. It wants to see rule by the best . . . By contrast, democracy wants to make room for the masses without differentiating according to achievement."<sup>199</sup>

The Kaiser was certainly not going to interrupt this convergence of views on the Right. The chancellor was told by one insider that if he advised the Kaiser to consider changing the Prussian suffrage, that would be tantamount to submitting his letter of resignation.<sup>200</sup> Bethmann felt the chill. In December 1913 he told his Prussian state ministry colleagues that the next throne speech should not mention suffrage reform. The "political excitement of the previous year"—meaning principally the Reichstag election of 1912 and its aftermath—provided a warning: attempting another suffrage reform now would cause "an equally strong political tremor."<sup>201</sup>

#### A NATIONALIST SUFFRAGE?

The anti-democratic mood among radical nationalists and the right-wing parties took tangible form in three discussions that merit our attention because suffrage reform was central to each one. These were (1) the so-called *Kaiserbuch* published by the chairman of the Pan-German League, Heinrich Claß; (2) a memorandum sent to the Prussian crown prince by a retired Bavarian navy captain, Baron Konstantin von Gebtsattel; and (3) the voluntary association formed specifically to oppose extending the vote to women. The context of each of these suffrage debates can be found in scholarly works on the Pan-German League, Bethmann Hollweg's chancellorship, and the German women's movement. What needs special emphasis is that each set of suffrage reforms reflected the cumulative effect of election battles fought in Germany over the preceding decade.

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(1) Heinrich Claß's pamphlet *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär* was published barely two months after the "red election" of January 1912. It appeared under the pseudonym of a "free man" (Frymann), and it deliberately assumed the mantle of a fantasy.<sup>202</sup> In the view of some historians, Claß's *Kaiserbuch* offered only castles in the sand.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Dewitz in *Das Neue Deutschland*, 28.2.14, cited in Vietsch, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 165.

<sup>199</sup> *Nationalliberale Blätter* 26 (1914): 312.

<sup>200</sup> Karl Georg von Treutler to Bethmann, 13.7.13, cited in Vietsch, *Bethmann Hollweg*, 165.

<sup>201</sup> PrStMin. 31.12.13, ZStAM, Rep. 90a, B III 2b, Nr. 6, Bd. 162.

<sup>202</sup> [Heinrich Claß] (under the pseudonym of Daniel Frymann), *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär*—*Politische Wahrheiten und Notwendigkeiten*. I have used the 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1912). Excerpted as "Shades of the Future? Daniel Frymann [Heinrich Claß] (1912)," GHDI vol. 5, sec. 5: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=776](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=776). See Hering, *Nation*, 319–44, esp. 334–8; Chickering, *We Men*, 285–7; Leicht, *Claß*, 151–64. All three authors also discuss Gebtsattel's memorandum.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Stegmann, *Erben*, 293–305; Hering, *Nation*, 327.

Against this judgment, many arguments can be made. They *have* been made in this book by documenting the enthusiasm among bourgeois Germans for a plural suffrage that privileged property and education and disadvantaged Social Democracy.

Other Pan-German authors, including Johannes Unold (1897), Philipp Bonhard (1902), Ernst Hasse (1907), and Heinrich Wolf (1911), had offered their own prescriptions for revising the Reichstag suffrage. But Claß's book reached a wider audience. By the time of the Third Reich it had gone through eight editions and sold approximately 38,000 copies.<sup>204</sup>

Those who sympathized with Claß's point of view could not criticize Bismarck directly. The cult of the Iron Chancellor was nowhere as strong as in the Pan-German League itself, but it suffused the rest of the nationalist opposition too. Therefore it was not possible to disavow two of Bismarck's most important (even "revolutionary") policies: the introduction of universal manhood suffrage in 1867 and the emancipation of the Jews in 1869. Instead, Pan-Germans and other radical nationalists had to represent Bismarck's greatest deeds in a different way—as the first step on the road to a future nation worthy of the name. One way Claß did so was to depict Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law as a "protective" complement (*Palladium*) to the Reichstag suffrage.<sup>205</sup> When Kaiser Wilhelm II and Bismarck's successors did away with this law in 1890, they began to unravel the foundation of the Reich.

According to Claß, ending the Anti-Socialist Law "put the ax to the roots of universal suffrage." How so? Universal suffrage, he wrote, "is politically possible only if the totality of the voters is filled with the same national and political sentiment, when all are in agreement on the foundations of the life of the state." Such a national consensus had been destroyed by the rise of Social Democracy, which tilted the balance of political life toward the "have-nots" and "uneducated."<sup>206</sup> Claß stated what anti-democratic politicians and statesmen had said many times before: "There can no longer be any doubt that the Reichstag is not a popular representation that commands the respect of state-supporting circles of the population."<sup>207</sup>

At its core, Claß's ideal suffrage was the exact opposite of the Reichstag suffrage. It was not universal—even though Claß claimed it was. It was not equal and it was not direct. Claß also ticked off other suffrage principles that were unsatisfactory. These included proportional representation, an estate-bound suffrage, and votes for women. His ideal suffrage was potentially mandatory (as antisemites, *Mittelständler*, and others had advocated for years): Claß didn't commit himself on this score. But no per diems salaries would be paid to Reichstag deputies: only men who were financially self-sufficient were worthy to be parliamentarians. A redistribution of Reichstag seats was rejected: it would provide greater representation for Germany's cities but lead to the election of more Social Democrats. And although the run-off

<sup>204</sup> Hering, *Nation*, 329; on the later ADV see Jackisch, *Pan-German League*; Hofmeister, "Monarchy."

<sup>205</sup> See the section "Von der Reichsreform," [Claß], *Kaiser*, 40–135, esp. 40–59, incl. "Palladium" (40).

<sup>206</sup> [Claß], *Kaiser*, 40. <sup>207</sup> [Claß], *Kaiser*, 44.

system had attracted Pan-German criticism in the past, it was also to be retained: it allowed parties—and, not coincidentally, groups like the Pan-Germans—to orchestrate “loyal” alliances against the SPD in the second round. These stipulations have a mainly negative valence, but we should not conclude that Claß, and those who thought like him, were beholden to the past. Claß conceived of his proposals as forward looking. They were.

*And yet:* Claß in 1912 proposed what Saxony’s *bürgerlich* parties had actually done in 1896, 1903, and 1909. The main difference was that Saxony’s Landtag suffrage achieved its final form through trial and error; Claß’s system remained in the realm of ideas. The similarities are striking nonetheless. Saxon legislators in 1896 replaced an equal and direct suffrage with a three-class system. Like its Prussian counterpart, this two-stage procedure asked voters to elect delegates who then chose a parliamentary deputy. This class-based suffrage represented one half of Claß’s proposal, except that he foresaw five classes, not three. In 1909, Saxon legislators devised a plural suffrage with one basic ballot and up to three supplemental ballots. This plural suffrage corresponded to the second half of Claß’s scheme. His multiple-ballot suffrage provided up to five ballots to men of property and privilege. What about 1903? In Saxony, that was the occasion when government leader Georg von Metzsch proposed a hybrid scheme that combined an occupational suffrage with elections organized by local bodies of government. Claß proposed a hybrid system too. He did not bother to provide any clarification of how the two parts of his system would work together. His proposal seemed to suggest that one or the other part, not both, might be implemented. In Saxony in 1903, government leader Metzsch and his suffrage expert were given no such latitude. They had to spell out the details of their plan in preliminary meetings with Landtag leaders and in the long *Denkschrift* of 31 December 1903. They tried, and failed, to find a Landtag majority in 1904 willing to approve their hybrid suffrage. Claß was not obliged to explain or defend his proposal. Instead he fudged the conspiratorial aspect of his *Kaiserbuch* and made it look like received knowledge.<sup>208</sup>

Claß outlined what qualifications would promote a voter into the next-higher class in his five-class system. Such preferment would be awarded to the following groups: men of “greater responsibility,” such as business and technical leaders of enterprises entrusted with a larger number of salaried employees; rural landowners, according to the size of their property and the number of workers they employed; active *Bürger* with honorary positions in local administration; higher civil servants and those with academic training, corresponding to their influence and the number of people they supervised; and “businessmen with independent workforces, etc.” Claß provided some examples: Even the smallest master craftsman, as long as he had apprentices from outside his family and irrespective of his tax exposure, would be promoted to the next highest voting class. State ministers and the heads of large companies (dockworks, factories, mines, commercial enterprises) would vote in the first class, even if their income alone did not put them there. The assignment of voters

<sup>208</sup> As suggested by the epigraph at the outset of this section.

to the intermediate classes would follow the "principle of responsibility." An adult male who paid no state taxes at all would not be eligible to vote in Reichstag elections.

The second part of Claß's suffrage proposal, providing up to five ballots to privileged voters, was based on the same principles as his class suffrage. This part, he claimed, provided the necessary unifying feature to the overall system because voters would not vote separately by class. As such it would be more organic than the Prussian suffrage. It also tilted preferment toward men of property: students and unemployed academics, for example, would not have the vote. Otherwise, these criteria favored exactly the type of men who typically joined the Pan-German League and other radical nationalist groups: well-educated members of the *Bürger-tum*. They were also the same criteria that were used, with greater attention to detail, by reformers who revised Leipzig's, Chemnitz's, and Dresden's municipal suffrages after 1894 and who revised the Saxon Landtag suffrage in 1909.

Unlike those reformers, Claß added two other groups that should be denied the vote for Reichstag elections. The first was Jews, who were to be denied both the right to vote and the right to stand as candidates.<sup>209</sup> In Claß's argument, this discrimination fit seamlessly among other demands for the exclusions of Jews from the legal and teaching professions, from the theatre and banking, from the press and ownership of rural property. Together these exclusions would "save the soul of the German people." The second group to be excluded were Social Democrats. The "masses" would be freed of their dangerous (and "Jewish") leadership if the following were literally expelled from Germany: all Social Democratic Reichstag and Landtag deputies, all party functionaries, all editors and publishers of socialist newspapers and journals, and all socialist trade union leaders. "Naturally the same goes for all anarchists." Claß conceded that this war on subversion could not be won at a single stroke: the battle would rage into the future. As he put it, "every new leader must be banished from the land immediately if he acts seditiously"; every newspaper that is founded as non-partisan must be "banned if it shows tendencies toward socialistic enmity to the state"; and "every public assembly must be dissolved if it threatens to succumb to the ideals of socialist propaganda."

The last important aspect of Claß's suffrage proposal was its close association with a coup d'état. As Claß wrote immediately after listing the Social Democratic threats to the nation, "one must reckon with armed rebellion." The proper response had to be a "decisive and vengeful attack." The consequences of going on the offensive would be less "gruesome" than "a slow and halting response" by the state.<sup>210</sup> Into this scenario Claß integrated the possibility of a world war—and the desire for one. War would cleanse Germany's domestic politics and integrate the nation.<sup>211</sup>

In early editions of his book, Claß foresaw movement toward a parliamentary system, based on the elitist principles he had outlined. As he put it, such chaos

<sup>209</sup> [Claß], *Kaiser*, 76f. and for the following passage. For sections on "*Kampf gegen den Umsturz*" and "*Reform des öffentlichen Lebens*," *ibid.*, 64–9, esp. 67.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 54f., 57. Cf. Pogge von Strandmann, "Staatsstreichpläne," 12; Stegmann, *Erben*; *idem*, "Repression."

would “set free” Germany’s monarch to undertake constitutional reform, including a state ministry responsible to parliament. The federal states would sign on “without too much difficulty.” But the *conditio sine qua non* of any such development was a fundamental reform of the Reichstag’s suffrage: only that would make Germany’s national parliament “serviceable” as a representative institution.<sup>212</sup>

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(2) Baron von Gebsattel claimed not to have read Claß’s *Kaiserbuch* before he composed his own “Thoughts on a Necessary Advancement in the Inner Development of Germany” in September 1913. Gebsattel’s private memorandum is vague enough for his claim to be plausible. The evidence suggests otherwise. In 1912–13 Gebsattel invited Claß to visit him in his Bavarian *Schloss*, and by 1914 he had been elected as vice-chairman of the Pan-German League. From this perch it seemed natural, as some Pan-Germans planned, to launch Gebsattel as a replacement for Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg when the opportunity arose. Many of Gebsattel’s ideas derived from Claß, including his thoughts on universal manhood suffrage. The “Jewish question,” abuse of the press, and Social Democracy’s demagoguery before the masses were to find their “solution” in a revision of the Reichstag suffrage. Such a revision could not be undertaken “legally”: it had to be handed down from above. This might be possible after a successful war, but Gebsattel preferred the possibility of a coup d’état after a “serious conflict” with the Reichstag.

As did Claß, Gebsattel based his “Thoughts” on the basic inequality of men.<sup>213</sup> Property, education, and other evidence of “achievement” took precedence in deciding who should represent “the people.” The principle of “universality” was too ingrained, he believed, to allow it to be taken from the German people. Therefore all males over the age of twenty-five would retain the vote. But in practice his suffrage proposal excluded many adult citizens, and it privileged others in familiar ways. Having fulfilled one’s military service was proof of “capacity” that Gebsattel demanded for enfranchisement; another was payment of at least one Mark in annual state taxes. Whoever owned ten hectares of land qualified for a second ballot; a hundred hectares sufficed for a third, and still larger holdings provided a fourth. There were other ways to earn extra ballots, including graduation from a university or polytechnic institution or rising through civil service ranks. Income thresholds permitted at least one supplementary ballot beyond these criteria.

Gebsattel adopted Claß’s exclusionary arguments against Jews and Social Democrats. Jews should be subject to an aliens law. Besides forfeiting the right to vote, they should be barred from military service, the legal profession (especially the judiciary), state administration, and higher education. With the exception of specially designated newspapers, Jews should also be kept out of the ranks of editors and publishers. Unsurprisingly, Social Democratic newspapers would also be

<sup>212</sup> Cf. [Claß], *Kaiser*, 57; Hering, *Nation*, 334–9, citing the 7th ed. (1925); Claß, *Strom*, 232–9.

<sup>213</sup> Pogge von Strandmann, “Staatsstreichpläne,” was one of the first studies to analyze Gebsattel’s memorandum and the negative reception it received from Bethmann Hollweg and the Kaiser. The following relies also on Hering, *Nation*, 339–41.

banned. Other measures to protect the “free press” and hunt subversives would be possible under a state of siege. Editors employed by the state, for example, would approve or revise the stenographic reports from parliamentary sittings. Anonymous newspaper articles would be outlawed or subjected to “ruinous” fines. And no newspaper or journal would be allowed to advocate abolition of the monarchy or of religion. In only one respect was Gebattel more decisive than Claß. Suffrage reform would point toward the rule of a single *Führer*.

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(3) Neither Claß nor Gebattel felt it necessary to muster arguments for the exclusion of women from voting; for them, it was self-evident. Not so for the Conservatives, radical nationalists, and other members of *bürgerlich* society who recognized the value of a league to combat female suffrage. The breadth and depth of anti-feminism in Imperial Germany has been well-chronicled.<sup>214</sup> Before the war, it fueled efforts on the Right to ensure that the women’s movement did not scale the male bastions of the Reichstag suffrage. It also lay beneath the surface of Conservative efforts to win new recruits across the gender divide after 1909. Conservatives tried to do so without yielding an inch on the suffrage question.<sup>215</sup>

In the year Red Saxony was born, a Saxon noblewoman, Kathinka von Rosen, gave organized life to a pre-existing bundle of anti-feminist ideas and interests. Her combative brochure, *On the Moral Weakness of Women* (1903), called on German women “courageously to declare war on . . . the enemies in their own land.” Five years later, another Saxon, Walter Boelicke from Plauen, offered his services to found a “Male Movement For the Solution of the Woman Question.” In the meantime, Theodor Fritsch’s antisemitic journal, *Der Hammer*, had begun to publish articles against the taint of feminism that allegedly imbued the Bülow Bloc.

These early efforts yielded meager results until the Reichstag election of 1912 brought the issue of female suffrage to center stage. Social Democracy had long included the vote for women, at all levels of governance, in its official program. The Dresden Chapter for Women’s Suffrage had petitioned the Saxon Landtag shortly before the 1912 election for the female vote in local elections.<sup>216</sup> That women had participated actively in the election campaign and that 110 Social Democrats now sat in the Reichstag made female suffrage seem less absurd. To counter this viewpoint, the German League to Combat Female Emancipation was founded in June 1912. This choice of name sent clear signals. In the radical nationalist vocabulary, a “league” often held the allure of conspiracy and radical commitment; the new organization would lead a “struggle” for many things, from “true femininity” to “male dominance”; and the league’s goals focused not only on precluding votes for women but also on the national (and international) discourse about female emancipation.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Begin with Planert, *Antifemismus*. On the apparent ease with which the suffrage was awarded to women in 1918/19, see Canning, “Geschlecht.”

<sup>215</sup> Retallack, *Notables*, 184f. For much of the following see Planert, *Antifeminismus*.

<sup>216</sup> Petition, *Dresden Ortsverein für Frauenstimmrecht* to I.K. (copy) (20.12.11), and *LT Mitt* 1911/12, I.K., 549ff. (26.4.12), in SHStAD, Mdl 4401.

<sup>217</sup> See Langemann, *Bund* [1912].

When the manifesto of the new League was published in the hothouse political atmosphere of 1912, it was a media event of the first order. The left-liberal press joined with Social Democracy in pouring scorn on the “reactionary [and] fearful” people backing the new league, whereas the Conservative and Catholic press was predictably supportive. Heinrich von Treitschke’s anti-feminist writings from the 1880s were resurrected, while the Agrarian League offered a scatter-shot broadside against women’s rights in general. One German feminist surveyed the press landscape in the summer of 1912 and concluded that “one can hardly pick up a [newspaper] from the right-wing and agrarian side without finding in it some article from either the male or female pens of the ‘Antis.’”<sup>218</sup> From time to time even the liberal papers accept [articles from] . . . the blessedly prolific ‘Antis.’<sup>219</sup> This terminology persisted, and the new league was soon known simply as the *Anti-Liga*.<sup>219</sup>

Ironically, the *Anti-Liga*’s mobilization of anti-feminism contributed to the democratization of German political life. In July 1914, one of Germany’s early feminists, Hedwig Dohm, remarked acidly on the unintended consequences unleashed by the *Anti-Liga*’s agitation. She referred to its “lance-breaking, ax-swinging” female members. Her words provide a fitting comment on Germany’s topsy-turvy political culture between January 1912 and July 1914.

This [*Anti-*] *Liga* is the most eloquent witness for the women’s movement. These countesses . . . and other wives of *Herrenhäuser*<sup>220</sup> . . . contradict their fundamental principle—“The woman belongs at home”—when they . . . take the speakers podiums . . . , [when they] bellow, agitate, proclaim, and make resolutions. Whoever takes the sword in [her] teeth has already hung up . . . the wooden spoon, the sewing needle, and whatever else belongs to hearth and home . . . They have transformed themselves, these . . . backward females;<sup>221</sup> they are akin to us, emancipated like us. They have thrown themselves into the stream of time which, without their knowing it, will propel them forward to our shore.<sup>222</sup>

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Countervailing pressures for change and stasis injected conflict into the core of national politics after 1909. Election campaigns were now orchestrated in a discordant new style. To be sure, in 1912–14 some parties reached out to others in ways that would have been condemned as heretical a few years earlier. These pacts were never predestined to fail. Nevertheless, threatened by the accelerating pace of political mobilization, democracy’s enemies did not change their tune. The overture to a more pluralistic electoral culture was cut short by gunshots in Sarajevo. Only during the war years, when meaningful elections were put on hold, could Social Democrats be accepted into Germany’s national chorus.

<sup>218</sup> Minna Cauer, in *Frauenbewegung* 18, Nr. 17 (1912): 131, cited in Planert, *Antifeminismus*, 123.

<sup>219</sup> It drew support mainly from the same urban, Protestant, bourgeois ranks of society that the Pan-German League and similar lobby groups did. Yet, only 6 percent of the *Anti-Liga*’s members came from Saxony.

<sup>220</sup> That is, members of the Prussian Landtag’s upper house, the *Herrenhaus*.

<sup>221</sup> The German term here was “*weibliche Rückwärtser*.”

<sup>222</sup> *Die Aktion* 4 (25.7.14), cited (original emphasis) in Planert, *Antifeminismus*, 133.

# 14

## Democracy Deferred

After August 1914, the “agony” of election battles made a mockery of Germans’ suffering in the trenches and at home. The first blow to the cause of electoral fairness came in Kaiser Wilhelm II’s famous pronouncement, “I no longer recognize any [political] parties, . . . only German brothers.”<sup>1</sup> This ushered in a *Burgfrieden* (domestic truce), which never actually existed except as wishful thinking among supporters of the war effort. Wilhelm’s stirring call attempted to roll back fifty years of political modernization in Germany. It focused attention on Berlin, not the federal states. It brought martial law to all corners of the Reich. And it foretold the end of suffrage reform and elections, which had culminated in the plural suffrage of 1909 and the “red elections” in 1912. The Kaiser hoped that the beginning of one war would provide victory in three others: the wars on particularism, subversion, and democracy.

As losses mounted on the western and eastern fronts and in the Atlantic, and as the authoritarian state failed to meet the demands of total war at home, the issues of peace and hunger initially dominated political debate. After 1916, the domestic truce began to tear at the edges, then disintegrated. By 1917, election battles had been rejoined—in efforts to devise a new suffrage for Prussia; in attempts to redefine the composition and competency of upper houses of parliament; and in the search for a *Neue Ordnung*. A “new order” would subsume changes in the other two realms because it would redefine relations between Germany’s representative institutions and its rulers. None of these developments was entirely new. As Lenin once observed, the First World War was a great accelerator.

### THE CRUCIBLE OF WAR

Prussia is bankrupt, and in Prussia [so is] the Conservative Party . . . In war, one can struggle on two fronts, [but] that is hardly possible in politics: to

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm II: “Should it now come to a battle, then there will be no more political parties. I, too, was attacked by the one or the other party. That was in peace. I forgive you now from the depths of my heart. I no longer recognize any parties or any confessions; today we are all German brothers and only German brothers.” Speech of 1.8.14 from the balcony of the royal palace. *Kriegsgrundschau* I, 43, in Bihl, *Quellen*.



defend the monarchy against democracy and against the monarch at the same time seems to me like trying to square the circle.

—Professor Johannes Haller to Philipp zu Eulenburg,  
10 November 1917<sup>2</sup>

Saxony is an unlucky spot—if it rains anywhere, it hails here, or if it is dry in Prussia, Saxony has a drought!

—Caroline Ethel Cooper, letter from Leipzig,  
28 May 1915<sup>3</sup>

Saxon politicians, by choice, remained behind events in Prussia and the Reich from 1914 until October 1918. The lower house of the Saxon Landtag met for the last time on Friday, 8 November 1918, in a session that lasted barely fifteen minutes.<sup>4</sup> It debated two motions and planned to consider two more the following Monday. One National Liberal deputy pointed out sarcastically that the upcoming discussion of “two very important points” should not blind the house to the fact that the “German Reich is ablaze in flames.”<sup>5</sup> He proposed that the Landtag adjourn because its members had better things to do. This suggestion was opposed by the Majority Social Democrat Julius Fräßdorf, who now sat in the lower house’s *Präsidium*. Fräßdorf declared that even though the motions to be discussed were inconsequential, it was important for Saxony’s Landtag to remain in session during chaotic times like these. Ironically, this argument had been used in July 1866—just one month before August Bebel founded the Saxon People’s Party. At that time, Saxon government leader Richard von Friesen had argued that he had to convene the Landtag even under Prussian occupation: by doing so, he would demonstrate Saxony’s constitutional sovereignty, just as Bismarck’s “revolution from above” gathered steam. Fräßdorf’s hope in 1918—that the Saxon Landtag would continue to function and limit the scope of revolution—was more illusory.

When Fräßdorf spoke, Saxony was already governed by a state ministry drawn (mainly) from parties in the Landtag. It exercised authority for a fortnight, from 26 October to 9 November. During this period, Saxony did not experiment with popular government based on the will of the people. Instead it tried to muddle through with a state ministry based on the will of the Landtag’s *party leaders*. Their goal was to prevent socialism—now in the guise of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and the Spartacus League—from flooding the Landtag’s lower house. This goal differed hardly at all from the goals pursued by enemies of democracy in the suffrage reforms of 1868, 1896, 1909 and in years when Reichstag, Landtag, and municipal elections were fought. The rules of the electoral game remained skewed until the Saxon state crumbled in upon itself.

<sup>2</sup> Eulenburg, *Korrespondenz*, 3:2235. Haller was Eulenburg’s first biographer.

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, *Behind the Lines*, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Besides LT and RT debates, envoys’ reports, and local studies cited below, this section draws on Czzychun, “Modernisation”; Nonn, “Politics”; and Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 86–188.

<sup>5</sup> *LTMitt* 1917/18, II.K., 1:2251 (NL MdLT Karl Posern, 8.11.18).

# SUFFRAGE REFORM

Food scarcity and high prices revealed that Saxony's *Burgfrieden* was also a chimera.<sup>6</sup> As a landlocked territory whose economy was dependent on export industries, Saxony was hard-hit earlier than other parts of Germany by the Allied food blockade and the shutdown of non-essential trades. But a familiar progression from social to political protest was evident in Saxony as it was elsewhere. Unrest bubbled as early as February 1915, followed by the "butter riots" of October 1915 in Chemnitz, which required military intervention.<sup>7</sup> In May 1916 hunger riots broke out in Leipzig's working-class suburbs.<sup>8</sup> The "turnip winter" of 1916/17 began a wave of strikes that were less easy to alleviate. In early November 1916 some 7,000 tobacco workers in Dresden—mainly women and youths—laid down work. In April 1917, almost 30,000 metal workers in Leipzig walked out. These strikes were for more food, better food, affordable food. Initially they were quieted by prompt government concessions.

As the casualty lists lengthened in the course of 1917, the unfair distribution of food, not just its quantity and quality, became a burning political issue. Those metal workers in Leipzig protested under the slogan "bread, peace, freedom." Dresden experienced a minor scandal when a fifteen-page list was made public, naming those who had been receiving special rations delivered to their door by a local supplier: the names included Conservative and National Liberal members of the city assembly and council—including the head of the rations committee. At this time Dresden soup kitchens were distributing "vegetable soup with barley" that chemical analysis revealed to be comprised of "60 percent ground acorns and chestnuts, 26 percent barley, and 14 percent undefinable vegetables."<sup>9</sup> Soldiers sent letters to their deputies, or directly to the ministry of the interior, complaining that their superiors received meat, butter, and fat, leaving them only "marmalade and salted herring."<sup>10</sup> Since the Saxon government was incapable of solving the food problem, it lay the blame on officials in Berlin. Government leader Vitzthum also took the step of preparing for larger outbreaks of strikes and other protests. In spring 1917 he devised a plan with Saxony's police and military authorities to bring the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSPD) and leaders of the Free Trade Union movement into a coalition to preserve domestic peace. The military was clearly at the center of this latest incarnation of a Saxon *Nebenregierung*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The daily hardships these produced on a local level are chronicled well in Chickering, *Freiburg*. On the socialists' RT declaration at the outset of the war, see "The Socialists Support the War (4 August 1914)," GHDI vol. 5, sec. 8: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=816](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=816).

<sup>7</sup> Pfalzer, "Butterkrawall"; for this and the following, Schmidt, *Burgfrieden*, 267–75.

<sup>8</sup> Dobson, *Authority*, 145f.

<sup>9</sup> DVZ, 28/29.2.16, 8.11.17, cited in Schmidt, *Burgfrieden*, 271f.

<sup>10</sup> Appeals of 2.11.16 and 7.4.17, SHStAD, Mdl 11070–1, cited in Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 311f.

<sup>11</sup> Backstairs government: see ch. 11. For this and the following, Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 136; Schmidt, *Burgfrieden*, 273; Mertens, *Zusammenarbeit*; Park, *Kriegsindustrie*.

What did cooperation between Majority Socialists and the state look like? On the one hand, during that massive walkout in April 1917, Richard Lipinski adhered to the MSPD's promise to do what it could to moderate disturbances. In return, government and military representatives promised wage increases, decreased hours of work, preservation of existing rations, and no change to Saxony's law of assembly. Significantly, Vitzthum made no concession on the issue of the Landtag suffrage; he only signaled his willingness to discuss it in the future. This could not satisfy the strikers' demand for democracy and a "democratic suffrage." The Leipzig protest was thus a continuation of calls for the mass strike and a first sign that the Majority Social Democrats would put the brakes on future revolutionary action.<sup>12</sup>

Parliamentary reform could not wait that long. The Landtag elected in October 1909 was scheduled to reach the end of its term in 1915. It was far from certain that elections would be put on hold during the domestic truce. The prospect of holding a second general election under the plural suffrage brought complications. On the one hand, enfranchised soldiers at the front would not be able to vote. In the opinion of the government and some right-wing observers, this would deprive the "state-supporting parties" of crucial votes (even though better logic suggested that working-class conscripts would support the SPD). On the other hand, the awarding of extra ballots under Saxony's plural suffrage of 1909 depended largely on income and taxes paid. In both respects, soldiers would be treated "unfairly" because their war salaries usually moved them to a lower tax bracket. In extreme cases they might lose their right to vote entirely.

Not principally to address these complications, but in order to avoid interrupting the *Burgfrieden* with a general election campaign, the Saxon government proposed to lengthen the Landtag's term by two years, to 1917. All parties, including the Social Democrats, supported this proposal. But they disagreed about which taxation year the voting lists should reflect. The SPD demanded that the new voter lists be based on the 1913 tax year. The government sought to defuse the issue by agreeing to use the 1914 or 1915 taxation years. But still parliament had to be recalled to agree to the two-year extension. So an extraordinary session of the Landtag was opened by the king on 22 June 1915. This provided an opportunity for Social Democrats to declare that the 1909 suffrage had to be replaced as soon as possible with universal manhood suffrage. The National Liberals supported the extension but only because the nation was at war: they also reiterated their wish to see parliament convene every year, not every two. The Conservatives fully backed the government's proposal and took the opportunity to chide the SPD for disavowing the *Burgfrieden* and thus demonstrating its lack of patriotism. The Progressive deputy Alfred Brodauf agreed that it would be inappropriate to hold an election without Saxony's soldiers in the field; but he and his party colleagues went on record as supporting a Landtag

<sup>12</sup> When municipal elections were held in Leipzig on 6.12.17, the USPD won the allegiance of most workers. See McKibbin, "Socialists"; McKibbin, "Working-Class," 282–97.

suffrage reform after the war, advocating the Reichstag suffrage for Landtag elections too.<sup>13</sup>

When the government's motion came out of committee on 8 July 1915, Hermann Fleißner expressed the SPD's outrage that the committee had not given any consideration to his party's proposal for a future suffrage reform: this, he said, was a slap in the face for Saxony's working classes. In response to Fleißner's outburst, the other parties rallied to the government side, as did the Landtag's upper house. A law dated 24 July 1915 extended the legislative period for two years, adding the proviso that any elector who might have been disenfranchised due to the war would retain his right to vote for the 1917 election.<sup>14</sup> This session was longer than the government wanted, and much more rancorous. With special emphasis, the Austrian envoy reported that the SPD's "long-standing demand to introduce the *Reichstag* suffrage for the Saxon *Landtag*" was "untimely in the extreme."<sup>15</sup>

In the Landtag sittings that ran from May to early July 1917, the Saxon government proposed another two-year extension, and again it found a majority to approve it.<sup>16</sup> By then, however, the political context had changed. The Kaiser's Easter Message of April 1917 had recognized the need to reform Prussia's three-class suffrage and promised other constitutional changes.<sup>17</sup> It was announced on the very day that the left-wing Social Democrats founded the Independent Social Democratic Party. As the Prussian envoy in Dresden put it at the time, "The All-Highest *Osterbotschaft* has allowed many wishes for revision of the suffrage and the constitution to become manifest in Saxony"—wishes that "otherwise would likely have been turned back."<sup>18</sup> A flood of motions followed from the Majority Social Democrats and both liberal parties. Then, in early July 1917, a genuine crisis enveloped the Reich capital: an Inter-Caucus Committee was formed in the Reichstag on 6 July; it issued a Peace Resolution on 19 July;<sup>19</sup> and Matthias Erzberger and Gustav Stresemann brought the Center and National Liberal parties into the *fronde* that toppled Bethmann Hollweg on 23 July. The Supreme Army Command soon exerted dominance over the weak Georg Michaelis, who had replaced Bethmann as chancellor but who was himself replaced before the end of 1917 by Georg von Hertling.

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<sup>13</sup> See *LT Mitt* 1915, II.K., 6–14; Dekret Nr. 7 (22.6.15), with Prussian envoy to Saxony, Count Ulrich von Schwerin, 7.5.15, 20.5.15, 24.6.15, 16/17.7.15, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9; Austrian envoy to Saxony, Baron Karl von Braun, 27.4.15, 23.7.15, HHStAV, PAV/55.

<sup>14</sup> *LT Mitt* 1915, II.K., 188–95 (8.7.15).

<sup>15</sup> Braun, 23.7.15, cited previously (original emphasis); Schwerin, 16.7.15, cited previously. For some of the following, RHRT, 2:1157f. and 1132f. on 3: Bautzen.

<sup>16</sup> *GVBl* 1917, 67f., Nr. 37 (6.6.17), noting that tax payments in 1914, 1915, 1916, or 1917 could be used to calculate extra ballots for the next LT elections.

<sup>17</sup> See "Wilhelm II's 'Easter Message' (7 April 1917)," GHDI vol. 5, sec. 9: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=1808](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1808).

<sup>18</sup> Schwerin, 21.5.17, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9; see esp. *LT Mitt* 1915/17, II.K., 3:2301–61 (16.5.17).

<sup>19</sup> *SBD R*, XIII. Leg.-Per., II. Session, Anlagen, 321:1747.

Well before these events, in November 1916, a Saxon by-election had served as a bellwether.<sup>20</sup> This by-election was held in the Reichstag constituency of 11: Oschatz-Grimma. "The *Burgfrieden* has been broken for the first time," pronounced one observer. He was referring to only one component of the domestic truce, but an important one. According to an agreement adopted by all parties in the Reich, when a by-election was needed to replace a deceased deputy or because he had been promoted within the civil service, the party currently holding the seat would field an unopposed candidate. For the first two years of the war, the parties had stuck by this agreement. In November 1916, however, local Social Democrats nominated Richard Lipinski to replace the Conservative Ernst Giese (who had narrowly defeated Lipinski in January 1912 but died in mid-September 1916). Lipinski had joined left-wing Social Democrats who refused to approve war credits. Because he enjoyed wide respect in Saxony—especially among those who wanted to protest the incarceration of Karl Liebknecht in May 1916—the party leadership hoped he might help keep Independent Socialists from defecting. The contest immediately attracted national attention. "For many weeks now," wrote one observer, the election had been "passionately" debated "not only in the Saxon press but in all of Germany and in all political circles."<sup>21</sup>

National Liberals and Progressives chose not to nominate a candidate. But they were unhappy when the Conservatives nominated one of their rising stars, Max Wildgrube. A factory-owner in Dresden, Wildgrube had his finger in many pies. He was a prolific publicist for the national Conservative Party: in 1914 alone he published works on the political theories of Ludwig von Gerlach and on *England's Treason against Germany*. He supported the Agrarian League, belonged to the Pan-German League, and was even a co-founder of the Prussian League. In the spring of 1914 he had been chosen to chair the Saxon Conservative Party's new "industrial council."<sup>22</sup> And in October 1918, he was named as one of two non-Prussian representatives to a committee struck by Count Kuno von Westarp to save the German Conservative Party from extinction: the committee's charge was to devise a new party program and reach out to other right-wing groups.<sup>23</sup> In many respects Wildgrube was a new-and-improved version of Paul Mehnert.<sup>24</sup> He combined agrarianism with business connections, anti-socialism with chauvinistic foreign policy. One insider noted that Richard Lipinski and Max Wildgrube represented "diametrically opposed" extremes. Wildgrube was one of "the most decisive advocates of unrestricted submarine warfare and one of those Pan-German Hotspurs of the sharpest type, for whom the conduct of the war could not be

<sup>20</sup> See LVZ, 5/9/25/28.10.16; Vw, 7.10.16, 25.11.16; GStAM, MdI, CB S No. 141, Bd. I.

<sup>21</sup> Braun, 27.11.16, HHStAV, PAV/55.

<sup>22</sup> Wildgrube, *Konservatismus*; Stegmann, "Neokonservatismus."

<sup>23</sup> Westarp, *Konservative Politik im Übergang*, 17. Westarp was chair of the DKP's RT caucus. See Retallack, *Second Reich*, ch. 7, and Jones/Pyta, *Ich bin der letzte Preuße*.

<sup>24</sup> For the following, Braun, 27.11.16, HHStAV, PAV/55. Only an annotated index to the NL Karl Paul Mehnert remains in the SHStAD. Mehnert corresponded with other figures on the German Right during the war, e.g. Albert Bovenschen of the RvgSD, but he appears to have distanced himself from radical Pan-German war aims, as did the DKP leaders Westarp and Heydebrand. Cf. GStAB, NL Bovenschen, Abt. I, Lit. M, for correspondence with Mehnert 1916–18.

pressed too energetically and who also stood at the head of the *fronde* against the Reich chancellor." In this traditionally Conservative constituency, Wildgrube soundly defeated Lipinski on the first ballot.<sup>25</sup> A few months after he entered the Reichstag, Wildgrube was grinding these nationalist axes as a member of the Reichstag's Constitutional Committee.

Another Saxon bookend to the breakdown of the "domestic truce" was provided in January 1918 following the death of the antisemite Heinrich Gräfe, who had held 3: Bautzen since 1893.<sup>26</sup> The antisemitic Reformers, renamed the German *Völkisch* Party, renounced their right to nominate a candidate. A free-for-all ensued, pitting Conservative, Progressive, and SPD candidates against each other. The Conservatives claimed they were owed Gräfe's "inheritance" since he had been a guest of their Reichstag caucus after 1912. The Progressives claimed the domestic truce was irrelevant, since the antisemites did not endorse the lawyer Ernst Hermann, on whom the Conservatives insisted. The Progressives nominated the lawyer Richard Pudor. Remarkably, this left-liberal nominee was the brother of the Conservative-*völkisch* publicist Heinrich Pudor, who, as in the 1890s, was churning out hyper-nationalist and increasingly conspiratorial attacks on the government. The SPD justified its own action by declaring that Hermann did not endorse the Reichstag's Peace Resolution. Meanwhile the Progressives and National Liberals struck an election pact: it promised left-liberal help to the National Liberals in the next Landtag elections. This pact evaporated when the MSPD party secretary in Saxony (and future minister of the interior) Otto Uhlig reached the run-off ballot against Hermann. Under the impact of "very intensive propaganda" that boosted turnout for the run-off, the National Liberals supported Hermann and the Progressives supported Uhlig. The Majority Socialist took the seat with 52.4 percent of the run-off vote.

In the history of Reichstag elections in Saxony, this by-election both followed and broke with familiar patterns. On the one hand, the agitation of the German Fatherland Party, founded in the autumn of 1917, had allegedly antagonized moderate *bürgerlich* voters in the Bautzen region. Count Vitzthum claimed that the "absence of many right-thinking farmers' sons" at the front had also contributed to the MSPD victory. "Luckily," noted Vitzthum, Uhlig was "a very respectable and moderate socialist." On the other hand, as the Austrian envoy emphasized, losing 3: Bautzen in this "showdown" deprived the "parties of order" in Saxony "*of the last constituency that had remained in their hands since the founding of the Reich.*" For this reason the Bautzen by-election deserved to be noted "in the entire Reich and abroad too."<sup>27</sup> With twenty-one of twenty-three Reichstag seats now held by Social Democrats, Saxony "more than ever deserves the epithet 'Red Kingdom.'" This loss also provided "grist for the mill of opponents of equal suffrage in Saxony."

<sup>25</sup> On 23.11.16, Wildgrube won 55.8 percent of votes cast.

<sup>26</sup> See also clippings on the RT by-election in 18: Zwickau (13.5.18), won by the MSPD Richard Meier over his ÜSPD and Cons/NL rivals; GStAM, Mdl, CB S No. 141, Bd. I; BAP, RLB-PA, 5101; RHRT, 2:1179.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 28.1.18 (original emphasis), and other clippings in SHStAD, MdAA 4506.

And “with good reason,” the envoy added: “If the Reichstag suffrage were introduced in Saxony—as many are demanding—then the second chamber of the Landtag would be simply inundated by the Social Democrats. And naturally one wants to avoid that under any circumstances.”<sup>28</sup>

#### THE SEARCH FOR THE “NEW ORDER”

The July 1917 crisis in the Reich produced no equivalent upheaval of party majorities or government personnel in Saxony for more than twelve months. This delay was the consequence of four main developments.

First, Vitzthum’s government and the pivotal National Liberal Party believed in 1917 that the problems of food shortages and the desire for peace could only be resolved in Berlin. Time and again, they pointed to the need for events in Prussia and the Reich to “unfold” or “mature” before appropriate action could be taken in Saxony. Second, the lack of a Center Party and the pro-government orientation of Progressives and Majority Socialists produced in Saxony none of the pressure for radical, timely change that was felt in Berlin in mid-1917. Third, whereas the Federal Council remained mainly in the background as national affairs reached critical turning-points in the Reichstag, the upper chamber of the Saxon Landtag slowed the progress of reform in the lower house. It did so not only by opposing legislation approved by the other chamber but also because its very existence provided a distraction. Nationally, Bethmann’s efforts to find a *Neuorientierung* conflicted with the Reichstag majority parties’ efforts to establish a *Neuordnung*. That conflict focused attention on suffrage reform for the Prussian House of Deputies. Although we should not discount efforts to reform or abolish the Prussian Herrenhaus, proportionately they never drew as much time or attention as reform of the Saxon upper house did. This circumstance made Vitzthum’s delaying tactics more effective. Well into 1918 he could cling to the policy that the Reich government had had to abandon in 1917, namely, the promise that suffrage reform for the Landtag’s lower house would be decided only after “the successful completion of the war.” When pressed to the wall in 1917–18, Vitzthum conceded that he was willing to discuss reform of the upper house before the end of the war. This concession allowed him to skirt the issue of universal suffrage for the lower house until October 1918. At the same time, Vitzthum asserted that his government would consider only changes to the *composition* of Saxony’s upper house, not its constitutional prerogatives.

Fourth, the Saxon Landtag’s session of 1917, which began in mid-May, ended on 4 July—exactly when the search for a “new order” became acute in Berlin. This unlucky coincidence did not halt Saxon reform in its tracks. The spring session of 1917 had provided an opportunity to members of all parties to air their views on parliamentary and suffrage reform. Moreover, a Constitutional Committee, not unlike the one formed in the Reich, had ensured that debate on both issues

<sup>28</sup> Braun, 17.1.18, HHStAV, PAV/56.

percolated in the corridors of the Landtag even between plenary sessions. Acute food shortages, pessimism about the war's outcome, and strikes also continued to fuel demands for reform. Nevertheless, because the Saxon Landtag was not in session as crisis engulfed the Reich and drove Bethmann Hollweg from the chancellery, Vitzthum's foot-dragging could continue.

In Saxony, the *Burgfrieden* served as a kind of firewall between social and political pressures from below and the high-political "dance" in which the Landtag and the Saxon government both wanted to lead. Vitzthum was not the only politician who refused to be moved to action by demands from outside the chambers. All parties in the Landtag—except for the two socialist parties, which had to vie for popular support in this fluid situation—were determined to resist the introduction of universal suffrage. Without being able to dig in its heels as steadfastly as the Prussian state ministry, Vitzthum's government found (and exploited) more opportunities to deflect reform than did Michaelis and Hertling in the Reich.<sup>29</sup> Vitzthum could not have been more explicit when he told the house on 4 July 1917 that the Constitutional Committee was trying to "intimidate" the government. "Toward these methods," proclaimed Vitzthum, "I remain firm and stony! But I warn you: stop trying to put pressure on the government with threats of street demonstrations." Almost all party newspapers showed no sympathy for Vitzthum's position. Only the Conservatives' *Dresdner Nachrichten* rose to his defense. Surrounded by "a world of enemies," it asked, could Saxons really allow themselves the "luxury" of invoking the "politics of the street?" Barely a month later, Vitzthum agreed with Michaelis that strengthening the upper chambers in both Prussia and Saxony might contain reformist forces seeking to revise the suffrage for their lower houses and provide a new counterweight to their democratic influence.<sup>30</sup>

Undertones of Vitzthum's success in deflecting constitutional reform can be heard in the Austrian envoy's report from Dresden in January 1918: "As a New Year's gift," he wrote, "the Saxon government has had a draft bill for reform of the first chamber sent to the [Landtag]. Thereby this question—which in this land has been broached for so long since the slogans 'democratization' and 'new orientation' came to the fore . . . —has entered a new, pregnant stage."<sup>31</sup> Vitzthum had told the envoy that his bill, despite its shortcomings, would create "a more liberal upper house than any other parliament in Germany." But the government's bill did not come close to satisfying the Progressives or the socialists. The left-liberal *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* described the government's bill as a "sugar cookie": no one would grow fat on this "reform gruel." If the government believed that parliamentary reform could be reborn with such a "quick remedy," it was mistaken; for

<sup>29</sup> *LT Mitt* 1915/17, II.K., 4:2526–2631 (3/4.7.17); Prussian legation secretary Eberle (Dresden), 7.7.17, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9, citing Vitzthum and press reactions.

<sup>30</sup> Schwerin, 13.8.17, BAP, RAdI 16571 (copy); PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9. See also Saxon envoy to Prussia, Hans von Nostitz-Drzewiecki (Berlin), to Vitzthum (Dresden), 4.7.17 (copy, excerpt), SHStAD, Mdl 5513, reporting Gustav Noske's attacks on Bethmann Hollweg, Helfferich, and the Saxon government.

<sup>31</sup> Braun, 12.1.18, HHStAV, PAV/56, and for the following citation.



“at the same moment in Prussia, the state ministry at the side of the king is representing the people’s rights against Reaction with a suffrage reform bill.” What Vitzthum offered as reform, by comparison, “looks like a vote of mistrust in the Saxon people.”

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What reforms had the Saxon parties advocated during those Landtag sessions in mid-1917? What was Vitzthum’s response? And how much had things changed when Saxon deputies again debated the possibility of a *Neue Ordnung* in the spring and summer of 1918?

In May 1917, the Majority Socialist Julius Fräßdorf proposed—as he had in 1915—the introduction of a universal, equal suffrage for the Saxon Landtag, with proportional representation. Fräßdorf pointed to the Kaiser’s Easter Message and the effects of the war on Saxon society. Women in particular had demonstrated their right to the vote, and so had Saxon youth: therefore the voting age should be lowered to twenty. A more resolute call for reform was issued by Hermann Fleißner, who represented the USPD in the Landtag. In the session of 16 May 1917, Fleißner launched a sweeping attack on all parties, including the government, who propped up the existing order and rejected timely reform. He attacked censorship of the press, accused the National Liberals of subterfuge and “dilly-dallying,” and advocated complete abolishment of the upper house. Otherwise his suffrage proposals were similar to those of his one-time party comrade Fräßdorf.<sup>32</sup>

The Progressives shifted their emphasis from 1915—but not by much. Again their spokesman was Alfred Brodauf, who concentrated on reform of the upper house to provide better representation for industry and business. Like Fräßdorf, Brodauf cited the Kaiser’s Easter Message in arguing that Saxony could not fall behind the times—or behind Prussia. Now the Progressives said that thoroughgoing reform of both houses could not await the end of the war: if the suffering population were not given a means to express its unrest in parliament, the state would face dire consequences. The National Liberals still waffled. They saw only disadvantages to reforming the plural suffrage of 1909. As Franz Hettner stated, it had not been tested enough to merit being changed now. To protests from both wings of Social Democracy in the house, Hettner categorically rejected the Reichstag’s universal suffrage for the Saxon Landtag. He clung to the National Liberal mantra that universal suffrage would lead to the domination of one social class: workers. Therefore the National Liberals focused their reform ambitions on the upper house.

Besides warning Landtag deputies that street demonstrations could have grave consequences, Vitzthum told them that their principal duty was to address the masses’ social and economic grievances and leave political reform to the future. The upper house was likely to reject any meaningful suffrage reform anyway, he declared, and developments in Prussia and the Reich had to play out before Saxon

<sup>32</sup> For this and the following, *LTMitt* 1915/17, II.K., 3:2301–61 (16.5.17), and other sittings before 4.7.17.

policy could be formulated in a proper national context. To these arguments the Conservatives added the claim that wartime suffering and the Menshevik revolution in Russia had actually strengthened the monarchical idea in Germany. This produced caustic laughter on socialist benches.<sup>33</sup>

The only real progress made during the extended Landtag session of 1915–17 was formation of a special parliamentary committee to consider constitutional reform. This committee became known as both the Constitutional Committee and the New Order Committee.<sup>34</sup> The Conservative, National Liberal, and SPD caucuses were each represented by five members, the Progressives by two. Not a single member of this committee was aristocratic; most already stood atop their Saxon party organizations; and many went on to become state ministers in 1918 or 1919. The Independent Socialists were represented only by Hermann Fleißner. Having been elected under Saxony's plural suffrage in 1909, these men hardly represented the will of the people (see Table 14.1).

Mirroring their stance in the Reichstag, the Majority Social Democrats refused to chair this committee and allowed the National Liberals to do so instead. The MSPD thereby lost the initiative in suffrage reform. The National Liberals were able to put a range of other questions on the committee's agenda. They repeated their demand for annual sessions of the Landtag, and they revived the bugbear that had almost torpedoed the 1909 suffrage reform—the redrawing of urban and rural constituency boundaries. Saxon National Liberals did not demand reform with the same vehemence as their counterparts in Berlin. However, they were not the “central obstacle” to reform in Saxony either, as has been claimed.<sup>35</sup> Conservatives and the government were more determined, and more able, to resist change.

Vitzthum continued to look to Berlin for reasons not to act in Saxony. He believed a “new order” in Prussia might produce a more representative lower house but, as compensation, also increase the influence of the Herrenhaus.<sup>36</sup> He hoped this would have a salutary effect on Saxony's own constitutional conflict. Surprisingly, Vitzthum felt it might even be possible to appoint representatives of labor to upper houses of parliament outside Prussia.<sup>37</sup> The brewing storm in Berlin nevertheless suggested that government leaders in non-Prussian states should be

<sup>33</sup> See LT speeches and protocol of the GM meeting of 26.6.17 in SHStAD, Mdl 5513.

<sup>34</sup> *Verfassungsdeputation* and *Neuordnungsdeputation*. “Now Saxony too has its *Verfassungsausschuß*!” declared Braun in a report dated 24.5.17 (cited previously). The committee's four reports in *LT Akten* 1915/16, II.K., Berichte Nrn. 490, 498 (8/12.10.17); *LT Akten* 1917/18, II.K., Berichte Nrn. 189, 300 (9.4.18, 14.5.18). Nr. 498 in BAP, RADl 16571; Nr. 189 in SHStAD, Mdl 5459.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 143. Cf. Nonn, “Politics,” 315; Czychun, “Modernization,” 35.

<sup>36</sup> Schwerin, 7.7.17, 13.8.17, PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9; Braun, 11/12.7.17, 31.8.17, 15.9.17, HHStAV, PAV/55. Vitzthum told the II.K. that his government did not want “to transform the I. Kammer into an institution representing occupational groups”; rather, its goal was “to enhance the I. Kammer with experienced, knowledgeable, and respected persons who were deemed to have special qualifications as responsible legislators to serve the state and the commonweal.” *LTMitt* 1915/17, II. K., 4:2988 (11.10.17); Schwerin, 20.10.17, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Schwerin, 14.9.17 (copy), BAP, RADl 16571; PAAAB, Sachsen 60, Bd. 9; Vitzthum to Saxon envoy to Prussia Nostitz-Drzewiecki, 15.4.17, SHStAD, GsB, 999, Bd. 1; Nostitz-Drzewiecki to Vitzthum, 12.9.17 and 1.10.17, SHStAD, Mdl 5480 (and generally on the I.K.).

**Table 14.1.** Members of the Constitutional Committee, Saxon Landtag, 1917–18

Surname	First Name	Title/Occupation (English)	Title/Occupation (German)	Residence
<b>Conservatives</b>				
Andrä	Georg	agricultural counselor, estate owner	Ökonomierat, Rittergutsbesitzer	Dresden
Mangler	Otto	regional high court judge	Oberlandesgerichtsrat	Dresden
Mehnert, Dr.	Maximilian	district governor	Amtshauptmann	Plauen
Schanz, Dr.	Oskar	mayor	Bürgermeister	Oelsnitz
Schmidt	Oswin	director, Agrarian League in Saxony	Direktor, BdL Sachsens	Freiberg
<b>National Liberals</b>				
Anders	Gotthold	financial counselor	Rechnungsrat	Dresden
Hettner	Franz	district court director	Landgerichtsdirektor	Dresden
Schnabel	Alban	city counselor, businessman	Stadtrat, Firmenbesitzer	Reichenbach
Seyfert, Dr.	Richard	teachers' training college director	Lehrerseminardirektor	Zschopau
Zoephel, Dr.	Georg	lawyer	Rechtsanwalt	Leipzig
<b>Progressives</b>				
Brodauf	Alfred	district court judge	Landrichter	Chemnitz
Roth, Dr.	Friedrich	mayor	Bürgermeister	Burgstädt
<b>Social Democrats</b>				
Fleißner (USPD)	Hermann	editor (USPD)	Redakteur	Dresden
Heldt	Max	union secretary	Gewerkschaftssekretär	Chemnitz
Nitzsche	Emil	editor	Redakteur	Dresden
Uhlig	Otto	Saxon SPD party secretary	SPD Landesparteiensekretär	Dresden
Winkler	Max	textile workers union secretary	Textilarbeiter-Geschäftsführer	Dresden

*Source:* Außerordentliche Verfassungsdeputation, *LTMitt* 1915/17, II.K., 3:2361 (16.5.17); *SParl*.

prudent about all else. With semantic dodging and weaving, this is how Vitzthum described his own thoughts around this time:

If Kaiser Wilhelm's Easter Message had not seen the light of day, then he [Vitzthum] might already have been able to take up this reform [of Saxony's upper house] 'in peace and quiet' [*sic*]. Now this is conveniently no longer possible. For if one takes the justifiable position that every German federal state can and should determine its own affairs in this respect, then it would hardly be feasible or opportune—when talk of the "New Orientation" has taken on such great significance, and specifically when reform of the Herrenhaus stands on the agenda in Prussia—to set in motion a reform [in Saxony] without looking right and left and also, in particular, toward Berlin.<sup>38</sup>

As it happened, the Landtag's upper house drew out its deliberation of the committee's recommendations. In September 1917 it issued its negative verdict, which the lower house was not willing to accept. Majority Social Democrats, Progressives, and National Liberals agreed on the need to reduce the influence of agrarians and aristocrats in the upper house and to promote industrial, business, and professional interests. These parties sought other reforms in the direction of a parliamentary system, including the possibility of overturning an upper house veto on legislation that had twice passed the lower house, and the right of Landtag deputies to be heard when state ministers were appointed or dismissed. Resolutions on these matters were turned over to another interim committee.<sup>39</sup> But its recommendations would not be heard until 1918, when a new appropriation of war credits and another session of the Landtag were required.

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The search for a *Neuordnung* in Germany in 1917–18 focused on the struggle to replace the Prussian three-class suffrage with universal manhood suffrage. That struggle had crucial ramifications for party alignments in the Reichstag, ministerial changes in the Prussian state ministry, and the relationship between Kaiser Wilhelm II and the organs of state in both Prussia and the Reich. All these issues constrained Count Vitzthum's government in Dresden as it groped to meet the majority Landtag parties' demand for a "new order" in Saxony. The view from the provinces throws new light on Prussian suffrage reform, demonstrating that it was only one of a number of election battles waged from October 1917 to October 1918. These battles can be enumerated briefly under four points: together they reveal how and why the Saxon government failed the test of leadership in the last year of the war.

(1) As Vitzthum himself put it to colleagues in the state ministry in March 1918, the overriding question was simple but ultimately unanswerable: What suffrage for the lower house of the Landtag would provide the Saxon government with a new basis of support, without delivering parliament into the hands of socialists? Vitzthum broke down this overwhelming question into what he thought

<sup>38</sup> Braun, 1.5.17, cited previously.

<sup>39</sup> The "*Zwischendeputation*."

would be more manageable ones. Among those, Question 3 was most important, and it too could be broken into parts: “3. Is a revision of the [Landtag] suffrage a.) desirable? b.) auspicious? c.) to be attempted under any circumstances?”

Vitzthum and his new suffrage expert in the interior ministry, Privy Counselor Hermann Junck,<sup>40</sup> never squared the circle in attempting to answer this question. To question 3a.) these men provided the proverbial “Yes, but . . .” answer. Their underscoring registered doubts. A revision of the suffrage was “undoubtedly *desirable*,” they felt, “in particular with the aim of better security against a Social Democratic majority” in the Landtag. To question 3b.) they offered no definitive answer: “A revision of the suffrage by strengthening [its] plutocratic character is hopeless, because the present plural system [from 1909] has few friends in public opinion and in parliament and only provokes criticism. A plural system like the one the National Liberals want—that is, one that disregards income but instead is based on age and family status—only supports the masses.” Vitzthum and Junck ascribed “somewhat” better prospects to “a suffrage that takes account of social demands and nevertheless prevents the domination of a single occupational group or a single party.” Lastly, they answered question 3c.) with a definitive no: “If there is no certain prospect of enacting a better voting law, then it would be preferable to put aside a new experiment with the suffrage.”<sup>41</sup> As Vitzthum told his fellow ministers, in this case there was “no option but to await the outcome of the [Landtag] election in 1919.”

(2) Another battle that demanded the attention of the Saxon government was the planned reform of the Reichstag voting law. It would consolidate electoral districts in the large cities into single units where multiple deputies would be chosen on the basis of proportional representation.<sup>42</sup> This question occupied higher civil servants in Saxony’s ministry of the interior and in its Royal Statistical Office from the spring of 1917 onward. The anti-socialist intent of the reform was made clear when Reich State Secretary of the Interior Karl Helfferich first informed Saxon authorities about the planned legislation.<sup>43</sup> Because Social Democrats already won many big-city constituencies by overwhelming margins, proportional representation would allow non-socialist (or anti-socialist) minorities in those cities to recover some representation in the Reichstag. Proportional representation for the entire Reich, however, would not have the same anti-socialist effect and so was not considered.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. jur. Hermann Junck, AHM Ölsnitz (1899–1905), AHM Plauen (1906–9), then *Geheimer Regierungsrat* und *Vortragender Rat* in the MdL.

<sup>41</sup> Undated handwritten memorandum ([25/26].3.18), listing 9+ questions und answers, almost certainly a collaboration between Junck and Vitzthum. Marked “*Auf meinen Platz*,” it was used by Vitzthum in the GM meeting of 27.3.18; SHStAD, MdI 5459 (original emphasis). For the following, GM protocol of 27.3.18, *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> *SBDR*, 13. Leg.-Per., II. Session 1914/18, Drucksache Nr. 1288 (16.2.18). SHStAD, MdI 5445, which also holds H.G. Ermansdörffer-Charlottenberg, “Verhältnisswahl und Reichstag, I.” *PrJbb* 172, H. III (June 1918); cf. SHStAD, GsB, Nr. 2408 on the same topic, incl. SSdI Karl Helfferich to Saxon MdAA, 24.5.17 (copy).

<sup>43</sup> Helfferich to Saxon MdAA, 24.5.17 (copy), and Saxon MdAA to RAdI, 1.7.17 (copy), SHStAD, GsB, Nr. 2408.

(This calculation mirrored demands by National Liberals in Saxony in 1908–09, who had favored PR only for the big cities.) Although Berlin, Hamburg, and many other non-Saxon cities were slated to undergo this reform, the Saxon government was asked to respond to the possible inclusion of Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz. The Saxon minister of the interior believed that “an increase of 44 Reichstag seats [as in the draft proposal] is—in and of itself—highly undesirable . . . There is a danger that the new seats will fall mainly to the radical parties which are enemies of the Reich government. To later wrest the seats away from these parties is, as experience teaches, usually very difficult.”<sup>44</sup>

The Saxon government did its best to alert the Reich state secretaries in charge of this reform to other difficulties proportional representation presented to voters and officials alike. It pointed out that lists of party representatives to be chosen through a PR system would be off-putting to voters. They would also encourage political parties and party factions to pursue “unduly independent lines” and “dishonest election scheming.” The revision of the Reichstag voting law was legislated in July 1918.<sup>45</sup> It was never tested in practice.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, it represented another stage in the transnational conversation about suffrage reform that was considered in Chapter 9. The Reich government had attempted to overcome opposition to proportional representation by citing similar systems in Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, France, four Swiss cantons—even Tasmania.<sup>47</sup>

(3) The Saxon government battled to keep Majority Social Democrats in the camp of “state-supporting parties” during the war and to prevent Independent Socialists from making gains at their expense.<sup>48</sup> The Reich and Saxon governments both recognized that the USPD was already ascendant in the Leipzig region before the end of 1917. But the decades-old practice of clamping down on the distribution of socialist literature, and concocting untruths to defend such practices, continued in the domestic war against the radical socialists. Vitzthum once remarked that the Majority Socialists in the Landtag were reasonable, moderate parliamentarians with whom one could work. Indeed, when the war was barely a month old, Vitzthum had emphasized the need to work with Social Democrats who had voted for war credits: he described a coordination of domestic policy on this basis as an “opportunity of the century.” This, however, required police action against the followers of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and, closer to home, the USPD spokesman, Hermann Fleißner. In March 1916, Leipzig police in civilian clothes scooped up 1,116 flyers being distributed on the street by men, women, and children. The flyer

<sup>44</sup> Saxon MdI to Saxon MdAA, 8.2.18 (draft); SHStAD, MdI 5445.

<sup>45</sup> *SBDR*, 8.7.18, 5911ff.; *Reichs-Gesetzblatt* 1918, 1079 (24.8.18).

<sup>46</sup> Details of its implementation were still on the table when the November Revolution of 1918 required a new voting law for the Constituent National Assembly. See notes from a meeting in the RAdI (Berlin) on 15.11.18, SHStAD, MdI 5445. Other materials on suffrage reform 1917–19 in SHStAD, NL Robert Schulze, Nrn. 2–3. Schulze was *Ministerial-Direktor* in the Saxon MdI.

<sup>47</sup> *SBDR* 1914/17, Drucksache Nr. 895 (4.7.17), 34–6, and other materials in SHStAD, NL Robert Schulze, Nr. 3. The Saxon MdI also researched PR systems and reform to the upper houses in Baden, Bavaria, and the Thuringian states. SHStAD, MdI 5427, Bd. 3.

<sup>48</sup> See various Saxon references in PAAAB, Europa Generalia 82, No. 1, Bde. 23–28, *passim*.

itself, supporting the (left-wing) SPD Landtag deputy Friedrich Geyer, was confiscated because a single line charged the German government with pursuing a “war of conquest.” In 1917, Leipzig’s police director admitted that USPD flyers calling for work stoppages in 1917 had been falsely (and intentionally) attributed to foreign agents, in order to discredit them.<sup>49</sup>

(4) Vitzthum found himself faced with a dilemma that also challenged chancellors Michaelis and Hertling in Berlin: how to deal with the sudden appearance and unexpected popularity of the German Fatherland Party (DVP) after August 1917? Broadly speaking, both Vitzthum and King Friedrich August III were sympathetic to the Fatherland Party and its efforts to rally popular support for the war. When receiving delegations of Saxons suffering under wartime food shortages and labor disruptions, Vitzthum typically offered them the same panacea as the DVP: “Hold on—and win!” However, the king and his minister were less pleased by the hyper-nationalist, anti-socialist rhetoric used in the party’s agitation. It threatened to undermine a *modus vivendi* with the Majority Socialists after the war. The government’s neutrality toward the Fatherland Party did not sit well with nationalist leaders among the majority parties in the Landtag. They were tightly integrated into a political community that embraced the Fatherland Party and supported its aims.<sup>50</sup> That community had already played many roles in the nationalist opposition after 1903, helping integrate hyper-nationalism and radical antisemitism into earlier forms of anti-liberal, anti-socialist, and anti-democratic activity (see Figure 14.1).

The names attached to manifestos issued by Saxon nationalists during the war read like a Who’s Who of Landtag luminaries. These men supported the Saxon wing and the Dresden chapter of the Independent Committee for a German Peace, of the Pan-German League, and of the Fatherland Party. The National Liberal president of the Landtag’s lower house, Paul Vogel, was chair of the Fatherland Party’s Saxon organization, and Paul Mehnert was its co-chair. Its executive included members of the Landtag’s Constitutional Committee and other local leaders. The latter included Georg Andrä, the influential arch-conservative agrarian; Bernhard Blüher and Rudolf Dittrich, mayors of Dresden and Leipzig; Franz Hettner, head of the Saxon National Liberal Party; and two widely-respected noblemen, Prince Clemens zur Lippe and Count Joachim von Schönburg-Glauchau. The Fatherland Party’s local chapter in Dresden was chaired by Hettner, co-chaired by General Liebert’s election wire-puller Kurt Philipp, and joined by other well-known municipal figures, including the irrepressible Max Wildgrube.<sup>51</sup> As Saxony’s search for a “new order” became acute in late 1917 and early 1918,

<sup>49</sup> Polizeirat Dr. Michael (Leipzig) to Rkz and Pr. Mdl (Berlin), 6.3.16, PAAAB, Europa Generalia No. 82, No. 1, Bd. 26. For May 1916 to Dec. 1918, *ibid.*, Bde. 27–8.

<sup>50</sup> SHStAD, Mdl 11089.

<sup>51</sup> See SHStAD, NL Emil Hempel, for a list of Saxon organizations supporting the DVP’s “*Entschließung*” (20.8.17); for signatories to an appeal “*Deutsche Landsleute!*” [Sept. 1917] from the DVP’s Saxon *Landesverein* and the Dresden *Ortsverein*; and for a wide range of ADV propaganda (1916–18). Also Kolditz, “*Rolle*,” and GStAB, NL Wolfgang Kapp, Nr. 491.



**Figure 14.1.** Dedication of the Monument to the Battle of Nations, Leipzig, 1913. Kaiser Wilhelm II, Saxon King Friedrich August III, and other German rulers are shown. The *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* was built just outside Leipzig with funds collected by the German Patriots' League. From the author's collection.

these groups made it difficult for Vitzthum and his government to take account of liberal and democratic influences in Berlin.<sup>52</sup> With Pan-Germans and the Fatherland Party rampaging against “defeatism,” timely reform in Saxony receded into the distance.

<sup>52</sup> Braun, 18.10.18, HHStAV, PAV/56.



## ENDGAME

For two weeks in late October and early November 1918, Saxony experimented with something akin to parliamentary government. It was able to do so only because Count Vitzthum had reached a dead-end in his attempt to discover a suffrage reform that would win the trust of the Saxon people, meet the demands of the Landtag parties, and prevent socialists from flooding the lower chamber. In October 1917, the Landtag's Constitutional Committee had concluded that a new suffrage should be based on general, equal, direct, and secret voting, with one extra ballot for age and including proportional representation. For the next twelve months, Vitzthum wracked his brain to devise an alternative reform.<sup>53</sup> In the second and third weeks of October 1918, Vitzthum and his suffrage expert Hermann Junck scribbled a series of notes—possibly draft memoranda to the state ministry, possibly *aides-mémoires* for their own use—that represent their last thoughts on this matter.<sup>54</sup> These men saw no way around the impasse they had identified in March. To the question of whether meaningful suffrage reform should even be attempted, they had no answer. To his last days in office, Vitzthum misunderstood the democratizing age in which he lived.

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Germany's "new order" produced what one scholar has called the "imperial people's government" of Prince Max von Baden.<sup>55</sup> It lasted from 3 October to 9 November 1918. Saxony's "new order" arrived like a flash of lightning that *follows* the thunder clap. After a power struggle within the Saxon state ministry, King Friedrich August parted with his two most conservative ministers and with Vitzthum at the same time. On 25 October, the king accepted the resignation of Dr. Heinrich Beck, minister of culture, and Ernst von Seydewitz, minister of finance. Beck was an arch-conservative. He had formerly been mayor of Chemnitz (1896–1908), during which time he prided himself on devising that city's plutocratic eleven-class suffrage. Beck was also hated by Saxon liberals because their School Bill had failed to pass in the last two parliamentary sessions before the war. Vitzthum's resignation followed the next day. His successor as chair of Saxony's state ministry—still officially *primus unter pares*—was Rudolf Heinze.<sup>56</sup> He had taken the reins of Saxony's justice ministry on 1 July—"the first National Liberal minister in Saxony since 1848," reported the Prussian envoy Schwerin with some dismay. Now Heinze also assumed Vitzthum's portfolio of foreign affairs.<sup>57</sup> Succeeding Beck as culture minister was Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz, who had most recently been Saxony's envoy to Austria. Nostitz was still an outlier in the conservative camp: he was described at this time as not only highly "cultured" and

<sup>53</sup> The key files on the LT suffrage are SHStAD, Mdl 5459–60; on I.K. reform, Mdl 5479–81.

<sup>54</sup> Notes of 10/[12]/[14]/18.10.18, SHStAD, MdAA 4506 and Mdl 5513.

<sup>55</sup> Machtan, *Prinz Max von Baden*.

<sup>56</sup> He will be remembered from Chapter 13 as Paul Mehnert's interlocutor in August 1911.

<sup>57</sup> Schwerin, 14.6.18, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, No. 2, Bd. 3.

“literary” but also “distinctly liberal.”<sup>58</sup> Succeeding Seydewitz in finance was the relatively unknown Otto Schröder—another conservative. The wholly unpolitical war minister, Victor von Wilsdorf, remained in office. Succeeding Vitzthum as interior minister was Walter Koch, who had previously held high office in the same ministry. Vitzthum had tried to avoid following his conservative colleagues into retirement. But the Social Democrats had made it known that they would not support a new government with him at its head, so the king had accepted his resignation too.

Other reforms had been in the works for some time. One of them foresaw splitting up Saxony’s traditional five ministries: education was to be separated from culture, labor from internal affairs, transportation from finance. However, since such major changes could not be made without approval of the Landtag, which was not due to convene until 28 October, it was decided to resurrect the institution of *Staatsrat* (state council).<sup>59</sup> The aim was to fill it with seven representatives from each house of the Landtag and thereby give the government a broader base. The presidents of both houses were also appointed, as was the Saxon crown prince. This step was considered all the more necessary after the Independent Social Democrat Hermann Fleißner used the floor of the Landtag on the first day of the new session to demand the immediate end to martial law in Saxony. The Majority Socialists rejected Fleißner’s motion out of hand: they shared the fear that Saxon politics was spinning out of control.

After the *Staatsrat* was proclaimed on 29 October, it held its first meeting the next day. Its most important decision was to appoint four further ministers without portfolio. They were appointed from parliamentary ranks, bringing the state ministry to nine members. The necessary legislation was introduced in both houses of the Landtag on 31 October and passed on 1 November.<sup>60</sup> “It is impossible for legislation to pass any faster!” exclaimed the Austrian envoy. The new ministers were Max Heldt and Julius Fräßdorf representing the MSPD, Oskar Günther for the Progressives, and Emil Nitzschke for the National Liberals. Conservatives were shut out completely from these new state ministry positions.<sup>61</sup> This was not enough for the Independent Socialist Fleißner. During the debate of 1 November, he charged that the Saxon people were given no say over these changes to Saxony’s institutions of state: what was actually unfolding, Fleißner claimed, was “pseudo-parliamentarism of the worst kind.”<sup>62</sup> Heinze’s ministry thought better of the king’s idea of inviting members of both houses to the palace for a sociable evening, to foster trust between the monarch and his people. Fleißner scorned this idea of a

<sup>58</sup> On these changes, Schwerin, 28.10.18, *ibid.* Bd. 4, and for following remarks. On Alfred von Nostitz’s earlier career, see Chapters 9 and 11.

<sup>59</sup> *GVBl* 1918, Nr. 83, 349f. (29.10.18), listing members; Schwerin, 2.11.18, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 21.

<sup>60</sup> *LT Akten* 1917/18, II.K., Dekret Nr. 44 (30.10.18), passed by both houses on 1.11.18 over three dissenting votes from the USPD in the II.K.

<sup>61</sup> See Braun, 3.11.18, HHStAV, PAV/56, also on Fleißner’s remarks against the monarchy and the MSPD’s unwillingness to commit itself to a republic at this time. Cf. Schwerin, 26/28/29.10.18, 2/3.12.18, PAAAB, Sachsen 55, No. 2, Bd. 4.

<sup>62</sup> *LT Mitt* 1917/18, II.K., 3:2168–70 (1.11.18).

parliamentary *Bierabend* as another cruel joke. Gentlemen from the upper chamber would rub shoulders with deputies from the lower house during the evening; but this token recognition of parliament, in Fleißner's eyes, together with the "whole bungle" of the *Staatsrat*, was nothing more than "a new edition of Saxony's former backstairs government."

If we review the list of deputies appointed to the *Staatsrat*—appointed after the party caucuses made their "suggestions" to the king—we can see why Fleißner and the Independent Socialists were outraged. It included many of the kingdom's most prominent Conservative names. From the upper house: Paul Mehnert, Professor Adolph Wach, Mayor Bernhard Blüher, and commercial councilor Paul Wäntig.<sup>63</sup> From the lower house, all parties besides the USPD were represented.<sup>64</sup> The "arch-conservative" president of the upper chamber, Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt (brother of the departed government leader) was included, as was National Liberal Paul Vogel representing the lower chamber. Appraising these appointments, the Prussian envoy correctly observed "that the Conservatives are no longer left out in the cold."

With great anticipation Saxony's Landtag deputies awaited government leader Heinze's policy pronouncement on 5 November 1918.<sup>65</sup> In a speech that impressed foreign envoys,<sup>66</sup> Heinze began by telling the lower house that his government would soon put forward a suffrage reform proposal that would remove the "privileges of property and wealth." Gone entirely was the idea of awarding extra ballots to certain (male) voters according to age or marital status: the new suffrage would be "without any limitations." It would, however, incorporate proportional representation. Heinze declined to add any meat to these bones of suffrage reform, for instance by spelling out what system of PR might be used or whether it would apply to all Landtag constituencies. He stuck to the National Liberal shibboleth that proportional representation was needed to protect electoral minorities. He also indulged in wishful thinking. The government and the Landtag, he declared, would have little difficulty in agreeing on the details of a new suffrage. Over those details, of course, the Landtag parties and the Saxon government had been fighting since 1903. No matter. With equal self-assurance Heinze proclaimed that the next Landtag elections would be held after German soldiers had returned from the front and peace had been concluded. By this he meant "the late summer or autumn of next year"—1919. Without pausing, Heinze moved on to declare that both the upper and lower chambers would continue to form Saxony's Landtag (to which Fleißner interjected, "unfortunately"). The upper house would have to undergo reform, along the same occupational lines favored by National Liberals. It would include representatives from agriculture, industry, the civil service, and the working

<sup>63</sup> See *Sächsische Landtag 1909–15*.

<sup>64</sup> Hermann Böhme and Hans Spieß for the Conservatives, Emil Nitzschke and Richard Seyfert for the NLs, Alfred Brodauf for the Progressives, and Julius Fräßdorf and Karl Sindermann for the MSPD (they enjoyed the confidence of the Free Trade Unions).

<sup>65</sup> *LTMitt* 1917/18, II.K., 3:2185–91 (5.11.18).

<sup>66</sup> Schwerin, 8.11.18, as well as 2/13/15/19/26.11.18, PAAAB, Sachsen 48, Bd. 21.

classes. To these would be added “exceptional individuals—politicians, scholars, artists, journalists et al.—who have offered useful service in any area of public life.”

The rest of Heinze’s declaration concerned economic and cultural matters of secondary importance, although here, too, he called for a “new order.” The Landtag deputies who spoke after Heinze dispensed predictable praise or criticism according to party doctrine. For Conservatives the proposed reforms went much too far. National Liberals and Progressives applauded Heinze’s plan as signifying a full conversion to parliamentary government. The Independent Socialists rejected Heinze’s program across the board. Their speaker was called to order twice by President Vogel for *lèse-majesté* and for insinuating that Germany had launched the war intentionally. The crucial response came from the Majority Socialists. For them, the government’s reforms did not go far enough. The upper house should be abolished completely and the government should be fully responsible to parliament (on the latter score, too, Heinze had kept his comments as vague as possible). However, in the end the MSPD speaker (Otto Uhlig) expressed his party’s endorsement of the new ministry.<sup>67</sup>

If we survey other actions undertaken by Saxony’s government to institute a “new order” between 26 October and 9 November 1918, the record is not impressive.<sup>68</sup> Heinze’s administration busied itself during this fortnight with making sure that civil servants got paid and received cost-of-living bonuses. It tried—with little success—to demand that Berlin deal with the abysmal food situation. And it took steps to ensure that key industries continued to operate. The same priorities characterized Saxon governance under the stewardship of Interior Minister Koch from the time the first soldiers- and workers’ councils sprang up on the evening of 8 November until a new united council, which included three USPD and three MSPD members, was constituted on 15 November. Two days earlier, the government had issued a statement that the king of Saxony had abdicated. On 18 November, the new socialist government announced the birth of the Saxon republic.<sup>69</sup> Another Red Saxony had been born. Like all the others, this one fooled many contemporaries into believing it had been born overnight.

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When peace broke out in November 1918, its coming could not mask the authoritarian state’s long-term success in holding back the tide of democracy since the 1860s. To be sure, social democratization had changed the look and feel of elections at every level of politics. But the deployment of political strategies to tar socialists with the democratic brush had not abated. During the war years, as in preceding decades, Germany’s electoral culture was a battleground: political

<sup>67</sup> *LTMitt* 1917/18, II.K., 2191–3 (5.11.18).

<sup>68</sup> See Nonn, “Politics,” 318–20. The literature on the November revolution in Saxony and the main events are surveyed in Rudolph, *Sozialdemokratie*, 169–88, to which one must add works by Carsten Schmidt, Sean Dobson, David McKibbin, and Peter Mertens. Envoys’ reports provide reflections on both high and low politics.

<sup>69</sup> *GVBl* (Republik Sachsen) 1918, Nr. 88.

democratization came at the eleventh hour, and its arrival bore witness to decades of struggle between reform and retrenchment. That struggle was not decided in 1918, even though the Second Reich and the dynastic houses at its pinnacle were toppled. The Saxon king's disgust in November 1918—"Now you can stew in your own garbage"—reflected opinion on the political Right that Germany had been defeated mainly by its "inner enemies." The stab-in-the-back legend had little effect on the shape of Germany's revolution initially. It nevertheless contributed to the triumph of democracy's enemies in January 1933.

## THE CURIOUS REPUBLIC OF GONDOUR

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

—L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953)

As soon as I had learned to speak the language a little, I became greatly interested in the people and the system of government. I found that the nation had at first tried universal suffrage pure and simple, but had thrown that form aside because the result was not satisfactory . . . A remedy was sought. The people believed they had found it . . . It was an odd idea, and ingenious.

—Mark Twain, *The Curious Republic of Gondour*<sup>70</sup>

Mark Twain had impeccable timing. His birth and death coincided almost exactly with the closest approach of Halley's Comet to Earth. His "whimsical sketch" about the curious republic of Gondour was timely too, bracketing Imperial Germany itself. The sketch was written in 1870–1, and it was reprinted in a popular American edition in 1919. The conceit of Twain's short story was adapted by the novelists Robert Heinlein and Nevil Shute, among others, and can be simply stated.

Gondour's inhabitants believed they had discovered the perfect political system.

The constitution gave every man a vote; therefore that vote was a vested right, and could not be taken away. But the constitution did not say that certain individuals might not be given two votes, or ten! . . . To offer to "limit" the suffrage might have made instant trouble; the offer to "enlarge" it had a pleasant aspect.

Gondour had previously suffered under an old system where parliaments were created by "hod-carriers": they "viewed official salaries from a hod-carrying point of view and compelled that view to be respected by their obsequious servants." This had led to corruption and disrespect for the institutions of state. A kind of constituent assembly was convened to enlarge the suffrage. Henceforth, every citizen possessed one vote, "so universal suffrage still reigned." But if he had

<sup>70</sup> Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), *The Curious Republic of Gondour and Other Whimsical Sketches*, orig. 1870/71, rpt. New York, 1919 etc. Available on many internet sites including that of Project Gutenberg: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=3192> (accessed 2 August 2016).

a primary school education and no money, he had two votes; a secondary school education gave him four; a university education gave him nine. Property-based votes were called “mortal” votes, because they could be lost; those based on education were called “immortal”: they were permanent, as long as a man did not go insane.

Twain ticked off all the benefits he witnessed under Gondour’s plural voting system. Men with fewer votes were conspicuously respectful of their neighbors; competitive examinations with “wild, intricate” questions ensured that experts filled the ranks of the civil service; even marriages were arranged with the eye to a good catch. A man who began life as a shoe-maker’s apprentice could hope, through hard work, to become someone who “swings twenty-two mortal votes and two immortal ones”—a “mighty valuable citizen.” A Grand Caliph could be elected for a term of twenty years, which Twain thought to be a tad long; but he could be impeached for misconduct, and “this great office had twice been ably filled by women.” Mark Twain was no stranger to the higher arts of German elections. As *A Tramp Abroad*, he witnessed a dozen Black Forest grandees choosing a new member for the parish Common Council. On that occasion too, Twain was not taken in by the seriousness of it all. These counselors “conducted themselves with sedate decorum,” for they were “men of position, men of influence, men of manure.”<sup>71</sup>

How could the plural voting system in the Republic of Gondour so closely mirror Saxony’s plural suffrage of 1909, devised almost forty years later? One answer is that liberals in Germany and, indeed, around the world, had sought to privilege *Bildung* and *Besitz* throughout the nineteenth century, not just after 1900.<sup>72</sup> A second answer is that republican Gondour doesn’t really look much like monarchical Saxony after all. Absent from Twain’s short story is the fundamental politicization of German society, with rocketing turnout rates for Reichstag and Landtag elections. Unmentioned are any protests from Gondour’s working classes about the preferment of social elites. Irrelevant are the increasing cost and intensity of campaigning for votes. Instead we find Twain’s affable incredulity that plural voting could have turned out so marvelously. The process of implementing Gondour’s plural voting scheme was unencumbered and obvious: suffrage reform debates had apparently been unnecessary when it came time to decide how much wealth bought how many votes. Nor were coups d’état or a *Kladderadatsch* cause for worry. These elements of Imperial Germany’s polity were beside the point for Twain. Yet in his parting shot, he registered his dislike for conformity and compulsion, which lay hidden in Gondour’s political system. The “dinning” in his ears—the screech of Gondour citizens that they had created the best of all possible worlds—was the same note of discord other democrats heard when the plural suffrage was touted as the suffrage of the future.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad*, orig. 1880 (New York, 2003), ch. xxii, 110.

<sup>72</sup> See esp. Kahan, *Liberalism*, with many examples.

## CONCLUSION: THE SPECTRE OF DEMOCRACY

A lost election can have the jolt of a drop through the gallows door . . .

—American literary critic James Wolcott<sup>73</sup>

She often said that her interest was the study of evil, and that she therefore didn't risk running out of topics.

—of Judith Shklar, by Stanley Hoffmann<sup>74</sup>

Germany's economic, social, and cultural modernization allowed political democracy to be deferred until 1918 and then, fifteen years later, destroyed. Democracy was held at bay despite the introduction of universal manhood suffrage in the process of nation-building (1866–71). It was undercut in the course of German and transnational conversations about how to enlarge national electorates. It was kept at arm's length during debates over the merits of a plural suffrage based on income, property, education, and age. It was put on hold to fight total war. And it was vilified during the late Weimar Republic. The rise of Nazism offered a new solution to democracy's challenge. In January 1933, the German Right believed that putting Hitler in the chancellor's office provided the best available means to avoid a democratic future.

The relationship between *Society and Democracy in Germany*<sup>75</sup> long ago drew scholarly attention to these developments and debates. But that attention focused mainly on the national picture. As this book has argued, penetrating to the subnational and local levels uncovers new facets of an anti-democratic consensus that permeated much of German society before 1918, at least beyond its working classes. The case of Saxony has been depicted as typical in some ways, unique in others: its history offers something to lumpers and splitters alike.

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In this book I have presented a set of theses, approaches, and interpretations that differ significantly from existing studies of Imperial German elections, most of which appeared in the years 1985 to 2000. I have done so for three principal reasons. First, the nuance that previous scholars imparted to their studies is often squeezed out when their findings are incorporated into survey histories. Second, this body of work is sometimes understood to disprove important continuities from the Kaiserreich to the Third Reich. Third, the variety of electoral cultures in the federated empire, and the availability of neglected sources that illuminate it, offer opportunities to move beyond the nation-state as an interpretive frame. Some of the best work on pre-1918 German elections has been based on international comparisons; for that reason I have chosen to focus instead on the overlaps among local, regional, and national spheres of politics (even though I address the

<sup>73</sup> Previously cited in ch. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Hoffmann, "Shklar," 84.

<sup>75</sup> The title of sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf's influential book from 1965. On "why Dahrendorf still matters," see Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 10.

transnational conversation about suffrage reform before 1914). The German experience has been shown to be less “peculiar” than we once thought in comparison to British, French, and American ones; for that reason I have not tried to situate Imperial Germany along a continuum from less to more democracy. This has freed me to grapple more systematically with the issue of continuities, real and potential, from the 1860s to 1918 and beyond. I have examined many agendas for reform—those that came to fruition and those that didn’t—in order to emphasize contingency in the longer arc of Germany’s political modernization. I have redirected attention back to parliaments in order to reassess the political calculus of older and newer elites. And I have examined the rhetorical, legal, and (occasionally) physical uses of violence to illuminate strategies of exclusion. I set out on these research paths, with these research goals, because I believe they redress imbalances in the existing literature—for instance, the neglect of the nineteenth century—and contribute to the advancement of German historiography in usefully provocative ways.

Because books like this one are often taken to confirm or challenge existing narratives, their authors bear the responsibility of pushing back against wrong-headed attempts to assign their findings to one scholarly camp or another. Certainly a divergence of opinion characterizes German and North American scholarship on elections in the Second Reich. This divergence maps roughly onto German scholars’ efforts to preserve some elements of the “special path” (*Sonderweg*) thesis, outlined in this book’s Introduction, and Anglo-American efforts to move away from it. On the German side, leading scholars have pointed to the ascendancy of political authoritarianism over political democracy in Imperial Germany.<sup>76</sup> Those who have focused on Saxon suffrage battles conclude that anti-democrats gave back less in 1909 than they had taken away in 1896.<sup>77</sup> By contrast, North American scholars have stressed the democratic victories scored by socialists, liberals, and Catholics as they fought to ensure Germans’ legal right to a fair vote.<sup>78</sup> These scholars have demonstrated beyond doubt that German voters participated enthusiastically in elections and made the democratic practice of casting a vote an

<sup>76</sup> See the list of Works Cited for studies by Thomas Kühne, Hartwin Spenkuch, Robert Arsenschek, Christoph Schönberger, Gerhard A. Ritter, and Wolfgang Schröder. Spenkuch and Kühne studied the upper and lower houses of Prussia’s Landtag. Arsenschek demonstrated the limitations of the Election Oversight Committee. Schönberger, among others, dissected the muted calls for German parliamentarization (as usefully distinct from democratization). Ritter and Schröder directed their attention to the rise of Social Democracy in Saxony and to the kingdom’s three suffrage reforms of 1868, 1896, and 1909. Brett Fairbairn also conceded that an anti-democratic culture survived up to 1918. He chronicled Imperial Germany’s “virulent anti-socialism” and the “lack of acceptance of democracy itself.” Fairbairn, *Democracy*, 259–62. He added that Imperial Germany’s political culture suffered above all from “the ineffectiveness or unwillingness of specific elites to pursue the accommodations necessary for democracy.” See also Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*, 90–125; Kühne, “Wahlrecht”; idem, “Political Culture”; idem, “Elections.”

<sup>77</sup> However, Simone Lässig and Karl Heinrich Pohl stress the progressive features of the 1909 reform.

<sup>78</sup> See Stanley Suval, *Electoral Politics*; Brett Fairbairn, *Democracy*; Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*. Jonathan Sperber, in *The Kaiser’s Voters*, showed the high degree of flux within socio-moral milieus and political camps. He also stressed (287–93) the need in future research to examine voters, party members, functionaries, and parliamentary representatives.



ingrained habit before 1914. They have also shown that German governments were unable to prevent Social Democrats and other opponents of the regime from achieving massive victories at the polls. They conclude that the seed of democracy was firmly planted in Imperial Germany's stony soil. Stanley Suval and Margaret Lavinia Anderson pushed this view furthest.<sup>79</sup> The Weimar Republic, they argued, was not hobbled by anti-democratic traditions inherited from the imperial era: "Things went very wrong in Germany after 1932, but it was not because the Kaiserreich had a deficit of democracy."<sup>80</sup> Implicitly alluding to Wilhelm Liebknecht's famous pronouncement that the Reichstag was merely the "fig-leaf of absolutism," Anderson has written that Germany in 1914 was not just "a monarchy with democratic adornments"; rather, it was a "'democratic' monarchy"—full stop. The inverted commas around "democratic" preserve the modesty of her claim without weakening it.<sup>81</sup> Anderson is perfectly aware, even adamant, that democracy "in practice has more than its share of ambiguities."<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, her conclusions have been taken as evidence that we need no longer look for anti-democratic continuities from Imperial Germany to the Nazi era.<sup>83</sup>

As noted in this book's Introduction, I embrace many findings that have helped dismantle the *Sonderweg* thesis, even though I believe that convincing arguments drawn from older scholarship should not be discarded just because they were conceived under different interpretive priorities than prevail today. My work confirms the importance of the *Bürgertum* in Imperial Germany. To be sure, that bourgeoisie was riven by cleavages of wealth, rank, power, and ideology. In Saxony, the rift between left liberals and National Liberals had grown wide by 1914. Nevertheless, the Saxon case is exemplary of arguments that the German bourgeoisie exercised *de facto* hegemony in the economic, social, and cultural spheres. Germany was governed by the rule of law and boasted a robust civil society.

<sup>79</sup> The "depoliticizing" and "authoritarian" aspects of Weimar's electoral system were "acquired, not inherited," wrote Suval. The reform agenda pushed by the German Left before 1918, he added, never called into question the prestige of universal suffrage. Suval, *Electoral Politics*, 227f., 247, 257.

<sup>80</sup> I am grateful to Margaret Lavinia Anderson for sharing the abstract for her paper at the *Deutscher Historikertag*, Hamburg, 20–23 September 2016. That paper draws on Anderson, "Demokratie auf schwierigem Pflaster" (2011), from which the following citation is taken (246). To avoid repetition I direct readers to a somewhat fuller elaboration of these thoughts in Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich*, ch. 8, esp. 237–44.

<sup>81</sup> To be clear: The resonance Anderson's pioneering work has achieved is fully deserved. A recent essay on transnational reform and democracy in Germany and America around 1900 demonstrates how broadly Anderson's viewpoint has been accepted. Allegedly neither nation suffered any "disenchantment with democracy." On the contrary: the "denial of democracy at this time" was a bygone relic of the last third of the nineteenth century and a new understanding of democracy had become a "modern consensus." Richter, "Transnational Reform."

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Here I would cast a skeptical eye on the catalogue of liberal virtues and successes compiled (e.g.) in Kurlander, "Liberalism," 107–8. The darker sides of a modern, reformist empire and their ramifications for later German history have long been recognized. See inter alia Blackburn/Eley, *Peculiarities*; Frie, *Kaiserreich*, 2nd ed.; Müller/Torp, *Imperial Germany Revisited*; Smith, *Continuities*; idem, *Oxford Handbook*.

Its public sphere was active, and critics of the government could be unforgiving. That bourgeoisie valorized achievement, education, and cultural pluralism to such an extent that it paid little heed to the ideals of social equality and political inclusiveness. Because neither democracy nor parliamentarism was its goal, the German *Bürgertum* became less willing to question the constitutional status quo. Only in 1917–18 did it embrace the need for fundamental reform. It did so in response to unprecedented challenges thrown up by the war and the delegitimation of the authoritarian state. As we have seen, Saxony's bourgeoisie and even some representatives of its working classes still defended the established order in the first week of November 1918.

The historical significance of the German bourgeoisie should not be judged by what it failed to accomplish. Stressing its unwillingness to embrace democracy or tolerate political heterodoxy potentially perpetuates a semantic confusion between "bourgeois"—a social category—and "liberal"—a political one. Historians rarely speak any longer of German liberalism's unfinished business, let alone its sins of omission or overall "failure." To do so leads into the trap of teleology. I have tried to decouple the terms "bourgeois" and "liberal"—as many have done before me—in response to untenable assertions about what the German bourgeoisie "should" have striven for, namely liberal democracy. To do so I have stressed that anti-democrats were plentiful among bourgeois Germans who professed liberal as well as conservative credentials.

If many "post-*Sonderweg*" studies stress the ascendancy of the German bourgeoisie in the economic, social, and cultural spheres, this book actually goes further. In these pages we have discovered that bourgeois politicians in Saxony were also powerful in defining political styles and opportunities.<sup>84</sup> In Saxony, it was not an older, agrarian, aristocratic elite but rather a newer, urban, bourgeois one, with close ties to business and industry, that steered the "parties of order" in anti-socialist and anti-democratic directions. Saxony shows the bourgeois face of authoritarian politics more clearly than any other German land. Every chapter of this book nonetheless confirms the importance of a friend-foe dichotomy whereby socialists, liberals, and Jews were targeted as enemies of the Reich. I agree with Brett Fairbairn that the "flaw in German [political] society lay less at the bottom than at the top," even though doing so makes me sound like an adherent of the Bielefeld School.<sup>85</sup> My agreement with Margaret Anderson's thesis about Germany's unstoppable social democratization should be clear, even though my evidence points to a profound disenchantment with democracy among broad swaths of Germany's middle and upper classes.

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<sup>84</sup> Blackbourn/Eley, *Peculiarities*, might have asserted the bourgeoisie's *political* power and successes more strongly than they did. I concede that the same is true of Eley/Retallack, "Introduction," in idem, *Wilhelmism*, esp. 6.

<sup>85</sup> On the Bielefelders, who reached the peak of their influence in the 1970s, see inter alia Retallack, *Germany in the Age of Kaiser Wilhelm II*, ch. 2; Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*; idem, *Ashgate Research Companion*; and works cited in note 83.

In this book's Introduction I posited three sets of arguments, and three approaches, to show that political modernization need not lead to democratic rule. It is time to take stock.

(1) *Election battles and democratization.* Election contests in Imperial Germany became a battleground—at times approaching “the moral equivalent of war”<sup>86</sup>—because social democratization speeded up while political democratization slowed down. I have focused on two kinds of election battles: those fought during election campaigns and those fought over suffrage rights. By deploying the concept of electoral culture, I have tried to supplement existing work about the experience of grass-roots electioneering with greater attention to the perceptions of Germans at higher levels of political activity. I have suggested that those perceptions—for example, what an ideal suffrage might look like—were contingent on where one stood in the empire. Anti-democrats in Saxony were not limited to defending an existing three-class suffrage, as they were in Prussia. And they did not undertake just one major suffrage reform, as in many other federal states. Saxons faced the challenge, but also the opportunity, of fundamentally revising their Landtag suffrage three times.

In 1868, a reformist chorus proclaimed that Saxony's suffrage should be aligned more closely with the Reichstag's. A generation later, mainstream political opinion in Saxony could hardly have been more different. A perceived crisis in 1895–96 provided the context for a second suffrage reform. The challenge had grown massively with the SPD's electoral success, something no one foresaw in 1868. The fear that “things were in the unmaking” was palpable.<sup>87</sup> But Saxon circumstances also provided an opportunity to hit out hard at “the reds”—so hard that they disappeared entirely from Saxony's parliament within five years. The long build-up to Saxony's third major suffrage revision, stretching from 1903 to 1909, brought the reform dilemma into still sharper focus. The anti-socialist consensus that had underpinned the nationalist “camp” since 1870 began to wobble as one after another suffrage scheme was examined and rejected. In memoranda written by civil servants, in parliamentary debates, and in diplomatic reports,<sup>88</sup> we saw the leavening effect of contingent plans, false appraisals, and wrong turns. In the end, by reaching agreement on a new suffrage explicitly designed to limit Social Democracy's representation in a reformed Landtag, Saxony's “parties of order” decided that suffrage questions could not be allowed to undermine their anti-socialist solidarity. From then until November 1918, they defended the anti-socialist bulwark they had erected through plural voting.

No longer do historians have to look exclusively to Prussia's agrarian elites, its three-class suffrage, or its “aristocratic authoritarian state”<sup>89</sup> to find a notorious

<sup>86</sup> In the memorable phrase of William James, 1910.

<sup>87</sup> This phrase from Stephen King provided an epigraph in Chapter 6.

<sup>88</sup> Particularly in Chs. 8–11.

<sup>89</sup> Rosenberg, “Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse,” 96. Drawing attention to the problems the non-socialist parties experienced in dealing with an enlarged electorate, Blackburn and Eley wrote that “nowhere was this more obvious than over the question of Prussian electoral reform.” *Peculiarities*, 21.

roadblock to political democratization. Although the German Right attempted to come to terms with social democratization by striking the mood of the people—through antisemitism, *Mittelstandspolitik*, and radical nationalism—it did not undergo “pseudo-democratization.” Instead it successfully portrayed one kind of election battle, on the hustings, as hateful and dangerous—so dangerous that another kind of battle, over suffrage regimes, changed the nation’s electoral culture. Led now by hard-headed bourgeois politicians like Paul Mehnert rather than woolly-headed nobles like Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha, German burghers became more receptive to a world-view in which Social Democracy threatened the foundations of *Deutschtum*. The notion that Prussian Junkers and the Agrarian League duped or pandered to “the masses” badly neglects the more proactive role of politicians like Mehnert. He used his connections in the bourgeois worlds of business and industry, in Saxony’s Agricultural Credit Association, and in the halls of power in Berlin to steer political crises toward anti-democratic resolutions. Mehnert was not Imperial Germany’s only bourgeois power-broker to be labeled an uncrowned king, but he was the only one to have a suffrage law named in his honor. As it happened, when “Mehnert’s Law” was imposed on Saxony’s electoral culture in 1896, Mehnert was just approaching the apogee of his power. His hubris had another decade to grow.

To appreciate the important reciprocity between social and political democratization, the ideal reader of this book will have seen the importance of determining “what counts,” in the sense of Tom Stoppard’s *mot* cited in the Introduction: “It’s not the voting that’s democracy, it’s the counting.” I have tried to help this reader penetrate beneath contemporary (polemical) references to “the masses” as well as scholars’ (abstract) references to “mass politics.” Quantifying things does not always demystify them, but it can help.<sup>90</sup> Saxony’s Royal Statistical Office and the Saxon branch of the SPD compiled and published data about elections and the parties that fought them. Thanks to their assiduousness it has been possible, on the one hand, to correlate a locality’s occupational structure with the voting preferences of its inhabitants and, on the other, to chart the organizational expansion of the SPD against the reactions of the “parties of order.” The fine gradations found in the sources sometimes make it difficult to determine whether “class” defined voting behavior and, if so, how much. But contemporaries looked past gaps in the evidence to draw their own conclusions about the meaning of recruitment campaigns and election battles. Precinct-level voting returns, turnout rates, winning percentages—these yardsticks helped Germans declare winners and losers once an election was over, even as spin-doctors also went to work.

As we have seen by comparing contemporaries’ expectations going into election campaigns with their reactions to election outcomes, the perceptions that are

<sup>90</sup> Chapters 9, 11, and 12 demonstrated that an extended, multifaceted debate swirled around the issue of awarding Saxon Landtag voters one, two, three, or four ballots in the suffrage reform of 1909. Specific conclusions have been possible by examining Saxony’s twenty-three Reichstag constituencies rather than all 397 across Germany, and by subdividing Saxony’s ninety-one Landtag constituencies into big-city, other-urban, and rural ones.

central to the concept of electoral culture help us use statistics as a means to an end. The enemies of democracy could not deny that over 50 percent of Saxon voters cast a ballot for Social Democracy in the Landtag elections of 1909 and the Reichstag elections of 1912. Yet it was far from clear how the various political parties and the government would interpret this result. In what sense, if at all, would they abide by the voters' preferences? Sometimes second-order calculations were thrown at first-order problems. Were Social Democrats still under-represented in the Saxon Landtag once they held twenty-five of ninety-one seats (27 percent)? Were they over-represented in the Berlin Reichstag when nineteen of twenty-three Saxon deputies (83 percent) were socialists?

Who decides? Who counts? These questions were posed in a cartoon entitled "Election Outcome," drawn by Thomas Theodor Heine: it was published in the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* (Plate 1).<sup>91</sup> When a red monster crawls out of a voting urn, the king's wife and daughter are terrified in a way not likely to be calmed by the guards running to the rescue. The king alone is resolute: suffrage questions will become moot once he faces up to his responsibility and appoints the parliamentary deputies himself. This cartoon appeared in the very month "Red Saxony" was born—June 1903. But we have seen that suffrage reforms were not decided by kings or even their top ministers. Just as national and international yardsticks of "fairness" were considered when local and regional suffrage laws were revised, local crises and appeals for protection from the "threat" of democracy fueled calls to do away with universal manhood suffrage for Germany's national parliament.

In these contexts, binary choices often dissolved. Legal and illegal methods of campaigning did not map neatly onto fair and unfair. Suffrage reform might be dependent upon constitutional reform, but it might also be subject to the power of the street. Gendered choices were being re-evaluated as peace ran out and the Great War dragged on. The right to define Germany's symbols of national authority also became more contentious. Proportional representation was seen by some Germans as progressive, by others as dangerous, while not everyone agreed that representation according to occupational estates was *passé*. The parliamentary procedures and committees that determined the outcome of constitutional reform added further to the confusion: "Who decides who decides?" Twice in Saxony,<sup>92</sup> a compact Landtag committee made up of caucus leaders determined the parameters within which a viable suffrage reform was sought. On both occasions, these parliamentarians showed no sympathy for the principle of "one man, one vote."

In 1895–96, Landtag deputies who belonged to Saxony's anti-socialist Kartell perpetrated the most egregious example of suffrage robbery in the history of the Kaiserreich. They claimed they had to dismantle a suffrage regime (from 1868) that was about to deliver the established order into the hands of violent revolutionaries. Their claim was a sham, but they got away with it for a decade. When a new

<sup>91</sup> "Wahlergebnis," by Thomas Theodor Heine, *Simplicissimus* 8 (1903–4), Nr. 53, Extra-Nummer, Reichstagswahl [June 1903], 1.

<sup>92</sup> In 1908–09 and 1917–18.

suffrage law became unavoidable—because the legitimacy of the Saxon state appeared to be crumbling—plural balloting offered new means to ensure that voters for Social Democracy were massively disadvantaged. Saxony's plural suffrage of 1909 ended a crisis that had lasted six years, but it was made possible by decades of attacks on the Reichstag suffrage and the parliaments it yielded. After Bismarck opted for universal manhood suffrage, the enemies of democracy had attacked it as subversive and un-German. More than once they suggested that a representative institution like the Reichstag had so thoroughly demonstrated its incapacity that it should be "sent packing."

Drawing on secret memoranda and other neglected sources, we have learned that statesmen and politicians who voiced these dire warnings were not misfits without influence. Count Vitzthum was only the last of Saxony's government leaders who refused to abide by the majority wishes of the electorate. Finance Minister Rüger was only the most forthright of democracy's enemies when he declared that the Saxon Landtag had grown dysfunctional and a coup d'état should be initiated. British envoy George Strachey was only the most caustic of foreign observers who reported that Saxon burghers would not act to protect their constitutional liberties. Beginning in 1866 and continuing into the first week of November 1918, anti-democrats unleashed myriad assaults on parliamentarism. Pulling this evidence together points to one conclusion: neither universal manhood suffrage nor Germany's parliamentary system enjoyed as much legitimacy among certain sectors of the *Bürgertum* as scholars presently believe. When election campaigns and suffrage reforms were routinely characterized as leaps in the dark, Germans learned to appreciate the risks and rewards of living in uncertain times—as we do today.

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(2) *Socialists and others.* Because the study of electoral culture takes emotions, perceptions, and beliefs seriously, this book has been able to explore Germans' subjective reactions to democratization. Since the last major study of Imperial German elections was published in 2000, a group of scholars has suggested another useful way in which we might conceptualize electoral battles between Social Democrats and other Germans. According to the Copenhagen School of International Relations, the concept of "securitization" can help explain how societies perceive certain issues as problems of security in regional and transnational contexts.<sup>93</sup> Such problems come to be seen as affecting the evolution and legitimation of the state, on the one hand, and the mechanisms of social integration and identity formation, on the other. Like democracy itself, "security" is one of those "essentially contested concepts" that can reveal social and cultural value systems. It can also illuminate relationships between individuals and groups and their changing assessments of freedom, liberty, and fairness.

<sup>93</sup> See Buzan/Wæver/de Wilde, *Security*; Conze, "Securitization."

The designation of certain questions as “security issues” can serve one set of goals in particular: to advocate, legitimate, and implement unusual political measures that would not be possible in a less dangerous world. In an earlier chapter we cited Rahm Emanuel’s famous advice to US President Barack Obama in 2008: “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.” In the summer of 2016, as these concluding remarks are being written, Great Britain has just voted to leave the European Union, a Donald Trump victory in the US presidential election has become plausible, and Canadians are being asked whether proportional representation should replace their “first-past-the-post” system.<sup>94</sup> The security issues that are grabbing headlines daily are not terribly different from ones that exercised German politicians in the Second Reich. We have seen how Saxon Conservatives used the bogey of faceless liberal bureaucrats in faraway Berlin to gain a foothold among angry and frustrated voters after 1866. Conservatives claimed they were protecting Saxon citizens from experts, centralizers, and liberals beyond their borders: particularism was a survival strategy. Conservatives and antisemites also promised relief from economic dislocation, cultural pessimism, and Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. As the Jewish “threat” became more tangible, visceral calls for attacks on the Jews were rebranded and repurposed as calls for a return to Protestant morality. Most conspicuously of all, the image of Social Democrats marauding through the streets, combined with evidence about the SPD’s “terroristic” campaign tactics, was used to conjure up a mood of national emergency and legitimize unfair suffrage reforms. Whether electoral reform was advocated as a means to forestall socialist triumphs or to pull the nation out of the parliamentary “swamp,” the same battle cry could be used: Make Germany safe again!

The “securitization” concept is not as new as its advocates proclaim, and it may prove unable to bear the explanatory weight imposed upon it. But it offers food for thought. It provides a new perspective from which to consider anti-socialism, anti-liberalism, and antisemitism together. The preceding argument has examined tactics, momentary crises, and the roles of powerful individuals as important in their own right. Yet, it has also suggested that the small elements of quotidian practice added up to a systemic, structural shift of attitudes—away from fair and equal participatory politics and toward exclusionary strategies that constituted the ideological bases of German politics later in the twentieth century. The insistence that Jews posed a threat to German society and culture; the determination to prevent Social Democrats from winning majorities in state parliaments; the reconceptualization of economic, social, and cultural modernity as an opportunity to launch a “crusade for religion, morality, and order”—each of these political strategies became part of a larger anti-democratic mindset. The spectre of democracy allowed anti-democrats to tar socialism, liberalism, and Judaism with the same brush, though not all brushstrokes were the same. This book has argued that the

<sup>94</sup> In November 2016, the improbable became reality: Donald Trump was elected to be the forty-fifth president of the United States. In February 2017, Canada’s Justin Trudeau and his Liberal Party put electoral reform indefinitely on hold, citing lack of consensus on a new system.

determination to prevent Social Democracy from overturning the established social and political order was more powerful than either anti-liberalism or antisemitism alone, and it appealed to wider circles of the bourgeoisie. To underscore this conclusion we have differentiated between the two constitutive elements of this “threat”—socialism and democracy—and we have sketched the symbolic connections between them. Simplifying only somewhat, democracy made socialism more fearsome and socialism made democracy more profane.

One last observation about “socialists and others” is apposite here. It is certainly possible to emphasize demagoguery and mendacity as defining characteristics of the anti-democratic politicians studied in this book. Though we might be dazzled by the ability of Saxon power-brokers to hold so many strands of power in their hands, we are also repelled by breast-beating patriots—the kind who were denounced by H. L. Mencken as “a dubious rabble of chautauqua orators, circus preachers, skyrocket politicians, bogus war heroes, half-witted pedagogues and professional uplifters, most of them with something to sell.”<sup>95</sup> The problem is that these two groups overlapped significantly.<sup>96</sup> Trying to place such men on a continuum from “cynical” or “irrational” at one end to “sincere” or “genuine” at the other end becomes a mug’s game. The same is true if we try to differentiate categorically between political crises that were merely exploited and those that were manufactured. Neither the sources nor the motivations of the individuals in question can be unveiled sufficiently to allow us to pin them down precisely. It is also important to take seriously their professed fears for the future of their state and to credit them with an understandable desire to make the most of political opportunities when they arose. That the SPD became the oldest and most reliable advocate of democracy in Germany is part of our perspective today. But German burghers before 1914 saw things differently. Barely a generation had passed since the rise of a modern capitalist economy had allowed them to wrest power and respect from the upper classes, and now they were being asked to share their rights, privileges, and even their property with those below them. The working classes were staking their own claims to equality and prosperity, and their political representatives in the SPD were doing so with revolutionary rhetoric. That such claims were seen as a threat by German burghers who feared losing control of political modernization is not terribly surprising. Even though we remain unwilling to *defend* democracy’s enemies, this perspective can help us understand their actions and explain their historical significance.

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(3) *Saxony and the Reich*. This book is based on a regional case study, though it has tried to document anti-democratic habits of mind that also had local, national, and global significance. Questions of method and perspective are linked. G. K. Chesterton’s Father Brown offered up a half-truth: “one sees great things from the

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Marcus Gee, “The White House ‘adorned by a downright moron,’” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 23 July 2016, F3.

<sup>96</sup> As the careers of Theodor Fritsch, Ernst Hasse, and Paul Mehnert demonstrate well.



valley; only small things from the peak."<sup>97</sup> In these pages we have tried to hike in both directions.

The notion that Prussia was responsible for later German disasters is a lie with long legs. Saxony shared anti-democratic traditions that characterized Prussian-dominated northern Germany. Yet Saxony was a middle-German territory. Its politicians and statesmen faced thorny questions about its role as a roadblock to democracy's advance from southwestern Germany into Prussia. Using Prussia as a proxy for Germany won't do, but neither will incautious composite observations about the processes of democratization in Imperial Germany's twenty-five states. I hope readers have found value in the regional maps and sub-national data that bolster electoral analysis for Saxony in the first instance and the Reich only secondarily; in the close study of parties in Saxony, their presses, their finances, and their leaders; in the attention to parliamentary debates from both houses of the Saxon Landtag; in the views of civil servants who personified the authoritarian Saxon state from top to bottom; in the calculations about income and property that Saxon statisticians used to prepare a "safe" suffrage reform; and in evidence of a glaring discrepancy between votes won and seats won in different suffrage regimes.

Regional history at its best includes attention to the local. In these pages we have seen how Dresden was dominated for years by a Conservative–antisemitic coalition, just as National Liberals and Social Democrats were the main contenders for power in Leipzig. These different constellations helped determine the shape of municipal suffrage reforms in these two cities, and in Chemnitz too. When we cast our eyes on Leipzig, when we examined tumults in Dresden's Altmarkt, when we considered the "Chemnitz rope affair," the trench warfare that characterized many election battles was viewed through local lenses. The important issue of "Who rules in Berlin?" has also been appraised with reference to claims that Saxony was ruled by a "backstairs government." In the process we found that antisemitic *Mittelständler* like Theodor Fritsch became influential in the interlocking directorate of the Right;<sup>98</sup> that champions of Jewish rights like Emil Lehmann could be marginalized with breathtaking ease; and that forward-looking Conservatives like Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz could unleash a political tempest by belling the cat of Conservative arrogance. Perhaps most surprising of all, by adopting a regional focus and diving deep into the files of Saxony's interior ministry, we have been able to chronicle the insights and doubts of Saxony's bourgeois suffrage experts: Bruno Merz in 1894–96, Anselm Rumpelt in 1903–04, Georg Heink in 1907–09, and Hermann Junck in 1917–18. We have plumbed the ambiguity of the advice they dispensed to Saxony's government leaders, and we have discovered that they, like their superiors, were unable to stand up to the anti-democratic plans formulated by the Saxon Kartell and pushed to fruition in the Saxon Landtag. This outcome changed the course of Saxony's political history in 1896 and 1909, but it speaks more broadly to the role of electoral politics and its

<sup>97</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (London, 1911).

<sup>98</sup> See Retallack, *German Right*, Introduction and ch. 1.

transmissive function between state and society in an evolving polity. By proposing—but failing to find—a parliamentary majority for reforms that would have made the Landtag suffrage more equitable, suffrage experts and Saxon statesmen demonstrated their subordination to bourgeois interests in the Landtag.

By now it should be clear that Saxony's uniqueness *and* its ability to throw new light on developments elsewhere in the German Reich make it worthy of study. Even the epithet "Red Saxony" should be understood in this dual sense. On the one hand, Saxony provides nothing more than the laboratory and the empirical foundation to derive conclusions about German developments and discourses. Just as the discredited Tour de France cyclist Lance Armstrong titled his memoir *It's Not About the Bike*, this book is not about Saxony. On the other hand, it *is* about a Saxony that was caught in a dialectical relationship between a "red" kingdom and one that bore the same black-white-red hues as the Imperial German flag. "Red Saxony" was a living, breathing reality, confirmed by one election after another. But depending on who was imagining it, "Red Saxony" was also a nightmarish vision of the future or a scream of terror. For some, the black-red-gold colors of 1848 seemed to provide a third alternative, while others would have gladly adopted the black-white colors of Prussia itself. Whatever the case, Saxon history cannot be considered in isolation from larger German developments if its study is going to advance and reorient research on the Second Reich.

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When the authoritarian Kaiserreich gave way to the Weimar Republic, the possibilities of a fascist dictatorship, genocide, and a second world war lay over the horizon. The people's community of Nazi dreams still lay far off in 1918. Without a series of deep historical ruptures—peace-making in 1919, hyper-inflation in 1923, the Great Depression after 1929—the Nazis' electoral success and Hitler's appointment as chancellor are unthinkable. Yet, Germans after 1933 were hostages to earlier struggles against socialism and democracy. As this book has tried to demonstrate for every decade it examined, the enemies of democracy did their utmost to establish affinitive relationships between democracy and socialism, democracy and liberalism, democracy and the Jews.

Each of those relationships came into focus in the second half of the 1860s. The choice of universal manhood suffrage for national elections and the birth of Social Democracy in its Saxon cradle were both decided in 1866, as we saw in Chapter 2. Jewish emancipation arrived in 1869. As we saw in Chapter 4, however, scarcely ten years later a modern antisemitic movement with both religious and racial components had emerged. When Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law came into effect in 1878, the bases of Germany's electoral culture were established, notwithstanding later shocks to the system. In subsequent decades, groups advocating reform and retrenchment fought for the upper hand. They forced the authoritarian state and the political parties that supported it to overcome—and sometimes to initiate—one crisis after another. While more work is needed to explain how antisemitism continued to exert a corrosive influence on party politics, the Saxon case illustrates the power of antisemitism as a "cultural code" that permeated and bound together

different segments of the German Right.<sup>99</sup> Pan-Germans and other hyper-nationalists ensured that strategies for disenfranchisement usually included denying Jews the right to vote as well. Efforts to marginalize certain groups socially and delegitimize them politically were part of a larger campaign against democracy. The deep, cumulative effect was to diminish respect for the principles of equality and fairness.

Modern German history is not best seen as leading to the “vanishing point” of 1942, when Auschwitz-Birkenau and other extermination camps became operational. The continuities that connect the 1860s to 1933 are more compelling. After the Nazi seizure of power, until 1945, election battles ceased in Germany. Democracy was killed off too. But its demise did not require a dictatorship, a terror state, or a world war that provided a screen for genocide in eastern Europe. Those came after 1933. From the moment Bismarck made universal suffrage the keystone of his revolution from above, until 1918, powerful representatives of bourgeois interests saw democracy as un-German.

The breadth and durability of anti-democratic views on the German Right throws into relief the difficulty of implementing *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* in Germany a century after the French Revolution. Long before the Russian Revolution and Nazism offered more radical options for realizing a utopian state, many German burghers wanted no part of a new global order based on the rights of workers, women, minority religions, and other oppressed groups. During the imperial era, they made political choices and embraced ideologies that allowed ruthless politicians, in a later era, to steer them further away from the ideals of liberty and pluralism.

For a time, Nazism appeared able to reconcile hardened veterans of election battles that had been fought with increasing ferocity since the 1860s. The Nazis succeeded where other anti-democrats had failed. They learned to be responsive to social groups that had been politicized by rapid socio-economic change and universal manhood suffrage. But in taking over previous arguments about the unsuitability of “the masses” for self-rule in democratic ways, the Nazis refined earlier methods of disenfranchisement and pursued them ruthlessly. Such methods lay beyond the reach of anti-democrats in Imperial Germany, not beyond their dreams. The authoritarian imagination was not limitless, but it was capacious.<sup>100</sup>

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It has been said that history has sides, and that the enemies of democracy put themselves on the wrong one. This book has tried to avoid such moral pronouncements. But it has been forthright in demonstrating who bore responsibility—willingly or not—for particular developments, and it has sought to explain how and why certain individuals and groups used their available room to maneuver at

<sup>99</sup> See Volkov, “Cultural Code,” and her other writings; further references in Retallack, *German Right*.

<sup>100</sup> The allusion is to the subtitle of Retallack, *German Right*: political limits of the authoritarian imagination.

particular junctures. In this way it has tried to bring debates about democracy into close proximity with developments in Europe's most transformative epoch of democratization—specifically 1860 to 1918, but with ramifications that extended deep into the twentieth century and, indeed, shaped its first half.

Over the *longue durée*, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, the mobilization of expanding electorates can be seen as a success story—and as a cautionary tale. The story is as uplifting as the tale is sobering. Both need telling in ways that focus on a particular time and place. The success story points toward equality and fairness. The cautionary tale reminds us that dictatorship and genocide are also possible outcomes of social democratization, and that democracy may lie beyond the grasp of billions of people who still strive for it.



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*Toronto*

*2 August 2016*





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FO 215, Embassy and Consular Archives, Germany: Saxony and the Saxon Duchies  
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# Index

- Abeken, Christian Wilhelm Ludwig (von) 108,  
122, 178, 185, 236, 240
- absolutism 44, 95–6, 395, 618
- Ackermann, Karl *Gustav* 107, 117, 160–1,  
176–7, 222, 254, 282, 315
- Action française* 374
- Adler, Victor 576
- African Americans 363
- Agrarian League 243, 250, 266, 284, 310, 312,  
319, 323, 327–8, 330, 354, 405, 422, 428,  
431, 438, 448, 485–6, 495–7, 499, 505,  
515, 556, 574, 582, 592, 598, 621
- Ahlwardt, Hermann 203, 261–3
- Albert, King of Saxony 28–9, 88–9, 114, 127,  
139, 177, 233, 236–8, 241, 257, 266, 270,  
273, 275, 277–80, 283, 288, 296, 302,  
304–5, 322, 406
- Allgemeine Zeitung* 416
- Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 212, 221, 223
- Alsace and Lorraine 95, 202, 291, 572
- Altenburg 142
- Altona 134
- Ames, Fisher 576
- anarchists 134, 192, 272–4, 277, 291, 308
- Anders, Friedrich Heinrich *Gottbold* 604
- Anderson, Margaret Lavinia 6, 157, 618–19
- Andrä, Gottfried *Georg* 438, 442, 447, 604, 608
- Anhalt 304
- Annaberg 21
- anti-Catholics and anti-Catholic  
sentiment 121–2, 256, 323, 418, 422,  
429, *see also* Kulturkampf
- anti-democrats and anti-democratic  
sentiment 6, 8, 117, 229, 293, 316, 363,  
369, 374, 435, 474, 537, 579–80, 584,  
586–7, 608, 616–20, 623, 625, 626, 628
- anti-feminism 591–2, *see also* *Anti-Liga*
- Anti-Jewish Congress, First (1882) 215–16  
*Manifesto to the Governments and Peoples of  
Christian States Endangered by  
Jewry* 215–16
- Anti-Jewish Congress, Second (1883) 216
- anti-liberals and anti-liberal sentiment 30,  
117–18, 203, 205, 207, 246, 314, 500,  
537, 550, 608, 624–5
- Anti-Liga* 591–2
- Anti-Revolution Bill 273, 280–1, 291, 311
- Anti-Socialist Law (1878–90) 8, 9, 37, 123,  
131–45, 150, 152, 159–68, 171–3,  
175–85, 190, 230, 233–9, 241, 272, 278,  
307–8, 382–3, 483, 587, 627
- §28 Lesser State of Siege, 133–4, 140–5, 151,  
161, 162–5, 168, 173–5, 177, 179, 238
- anti-socialists and anti-socialist sentiment 9,  
15, 16, 97, 100–1, 111, 113, 115–17,  
121–3, 125, 127–9, 137, 145, 150–3,  
157–8, 171, 174, 183, 190, 208, 221–3,  
229, 234, 236, 239–40, 263, 268, 275,  
277, 280–1, 284, 288, 310, 316, 318,  
322–3, 327, 357, 361, 366, 382, 388, 393,  
413, 415, 417–20, 422–3, 429–30, 432–4,  
435, 479, 491, 505, 507, 525, 537, 553,  
571–2, 577, 584–5, 606, 608, 619–20,  
622, 624, *see also* Imperial League against  
Social Democracy
- antisemites and antisemitism 9, 10, 117–18,  
155, 196, 199–205, 207–12, 214–29,  
230–1, 234–5, 240, 243–51, 255–60,  
262–8, 272, 284–5, 287–8, 298,  
301–2, 312–14, 321–3, 327, 329,  
330, 334, 340, 385, 398, 415, 420–1, 428,  
438, 444, 473, 499, 505, 511, 532, 537,  
574, 576, 585, 587, 599, 621, 624–5,  
626–7, *see also* Anti-Jewish Congress, First;  
Anti-Jewish Congress, Second; Berlin  
Antisemitism Dispute
- fellow-travelers 218, 225, 228
- opposition to conservatives 219, 226, 244,  
247–8
- publicists 204–12, 214–19, 244–8
- radical 198–9, 211, 213, 216, 227, 229, 230,  
234, 240, 244–5, 251–9, 261, 285, 319,  
321, 327–8, 608
- Antisemitic Congress (Bochum) 227
- Antisemitic German Social Party 227
- Antisemitic League (Berlin) 210
- Antisemitic Party and Antisemitic People's  
Party 244, 248–9
- Antisemitic State Association for the Kingdom of  
Saxony 227
- Antisemitische Correspondenz* 218–19
- Antisozialdemokratische Correspondenz* 36
- Arendt, Hannah 481
- Armstrong, Lance 627
- Arnim, Bern(har)d von 549
- Arsenschek, Robert 173
- Aristotle 82, 360
- Army Bill (1887) 156, 167, 182, 191
- Army Bill (1893) 243, 257, 259, 261, 266
- Arnhold family 203
- Asch, Ludwig 416–18, 421–6, 555
- Association for the Distribution of Christian  
Literature 214
- Saxon People's Calendar* 214
- Association for the Distribution of Conservative  
Journals 213



- Association for the Distribution of Good,  
Popular Literature 213
- Association for the People's Welfare 213
- Association for Social Policy 387, 389
- Association of Saxon Industrialists 346, 350,  
355–6, 374, 405, 426, 438, 477, 493
- Association of Tax- and Economic  
Reformers 204
- Auden, W. H. 106
- Aue 222
- Auer, Ignaz 142, 175, 335
- Auerbach 453
- Australia 362
- Austria 12, 20, 26, 59, 102–3, 111, 308, 363–6,  
369, 376, 385, 397, 433, 501  
Reichsrat 360, 364–6
- Austrian Christian Social Party 365–6
- Austrian Imperial Party 366
- Austrian Social Democratic Party 365–6
- Austro-Prussian War (1866) 20, 26, 81,  
88, 90
- authoritarian state 6, 9, 11–12, 16, 80, 105–6,  
123, 157, 166, 230, 238, 274, 307,  
323, 387, 393, 402, 412–13, 475,  
494, 521, 536, 581, 584, 594, 613,  
618–20, 626–7
- authoritarianism 2, 6, 10–11, 14, 230–69, 318,  
408, 534, 547, 617, 628
- Ayers, Bill 250
- Baden 6, 13, 23, 34, 88, 162, 202, 360, 407,  
528, 544, 555, 579–80
- Baden, Maximilian (Max) von 610
- Badische Landeszeitung* 407
- Bär, Michael 438, 441–2, 523, 540
- Barcelona 272
- Bartsch, Max 491
- Bassermann, Ernst 369, 413, 485, 551, 553,  
555–8, 578, 583
- Bauer, Bruno 215
- Bauer, Erwin 245–6
- Bautzen 189, 448
- Bavaria 5, 6, 13, 21, 59, 88–9, 103, 115,  
122, 202, 279, 280, 304, 349, 360,  
371, 372, 375, 500–1, 515, 528,  
579–80
- Bavarian Farmers' League 572
- Bebel, August 1–2, 36–9, 52, 55–6, 58,  
62–4, 83, 91, 93–104, 106–12, 124,  
127–30, 134, 137–45, 149–52, 160–9,  
172–7, 182–3, 191–2, 197, 221, 226,  
234–9, 242, 266–7, 277–8, 288, 292, 301,  
304, 307–8, 318, 320, 325, 334–9, 371–2,  
425, 499, 519, 523, 539, 552–3, 571–3,  
576–7, 581, 594
- On the Landtag Elections in Saxony*  
(1891) 242
- Social Democracy and the Universal Suffrage.  
With Special Attention to the Female Vote  
and the Proportional Electoral System*  
(1895) 288
- The Implementation of the Law of Association  
and Assembly in the Kingdom of Saxony*  
(1897) 307
- Woman under Socialism* (1879) 37, 124
- Beck, Gustav Heinrich 610
- Beethoven, Ludwig van 460
- Belgian Workers' Party 363–4
- Belgium 189, 274, 291, 295, 321, 340, 351,  
353, 360, 363–4, 369, 433, 607  
Catholic Party 364  
Liberals 364  
parliament 71  
suffrage strikes 364, 369
- Below, Georg von 367
- Benoist, Charles 374–5, 377, 383  
*La crise de l'état modern* (1899) 374
- Berggückelhübel 478
- Berlin 15, 24, 34, 36, 46, 56, 58, 76, 79, 82, 90,  
92, 98–9, 112, 114–15, 122, 134, 137,  
139–43, 162–4, 170, 174, 177–9, 190,  
199, 205, 208–10, 212–13, 219–20, 225,  
227, 233, 237–8, 242, 245, 248, 257, 259,  
261, 266, 269, 271, 276–7, 281, 283, 285,  
300, 323, 330, 371, 401, 406, 416,  
434–44, 475, 495, 540, 550, 593, 607, 609  
police 308, 321, 347, 401
- Berlin Antisemitism Dispute 122
- Berlin, Isaiah 373
- Berliner Revue* 204
- Berliner Tageblatt* 535
- Bernstein, Eduard 304, 308, 335, 337–8, 383
- Beschwitz, Moritz Maximilian von 500–1
- Beseler, Maximilian (von) 549
- Beta, Ottomar 247
- Bethmann Hollweg, Theobald von 368–71,  
410, 434, 483, 485, 499, 531, 533, 537–8,  
547–8, 550–6, 559, 569, 573, 581–2,  
585–6, 590, 597, 600–1
- Beust, Friedrich Ferdinand von 24, 25, 26, 27,  
31, 32, 33, 35, 40, 44, 52, 54, 67–8, 69,  
78, 87, 186, 307
- Beutler, Gustav Otto 289, 291, 349, 427, 438,  
453, 486–7
- Bevan, Aneurin 187
- Bewer, Max 245–6, 258  
*Political Broadsheet* Number 12 245–6, 258
- Biedermann, Karl 31–2, 33–6, 49, 51, 53, 55, 68,  
76, 84–6, 86, 116, 124, 187–9, 225, 303
- Bielefeld School 619
- Bismarck, Otto von 3, 8, 16, 20, 26, 34–7,  
39–46, 47–9, 53–4, 57, 59–63, 66–7, 73,  
75–6, 78, 80, 82, 86, 88–91, 95–9, 102–5,  
112, 114–17, 120–4, 129, 131–4, 137–8,  
141–3, 152–3, 156–8, 161–2, 165–7, 170,  
178–83, 186–92, 204–5, 213–15, 225,  
229, 230–7, 242–6, 252, 255–6, 269, 271,  
281, 300–1, 313, 321, 338–9, 385, 403,  
412, 483, 556, 587, 594, 623, 627, 628
- Guelph Fund 116
- Literary Bureau 49
- Bismarck Archipelago 281

- Bleichröder, Gerson (von) 204, 211, 246  
 Bloch, Marc 1  
 Block, Hans 356  
 Blüher, Bernhard 560–1, 608, 612  
 Blum, Hans 87, 116  
 Blum, Robert 31  
*Bochumer Anzeiger* 413  
 Böckel, Otto 219, 226–7, 243–4  
 Boer War 320, 341  
 Boelicke, Walter 591  
 Bohemia 21  
 Boh, Felix 247, 251–2, 255  
     *Conservatism and the Jewish Question*  
     (1892) 247, 251  
 Böhmert, Victor 302  
 Bohne, Carl 171  
 Bonhard, Philipp 587  
 Bonn, University of 222  
 Borna 31, 119, 167, 506  
 Borries, Georg von 400  
 Bosse, Hans von 291  
 Boutmy, Émile 367  
 Bradley, Tom 271  
 Brandenburg 401  
 Braun, Karl von 411  
 Braun, Lily 402  
 Braunschweig 115, 304, 360  
 Bremen 528, 580  
 Breslau 199  
 Bretschneider, Rudolf 283  
 Briggs, Asa 78  
 Britain, *see* Great Britain  
 Brockhaus, Friedrich 34  
 Brockhaus, Heinrich 34  
 Brodauf, Franz *Alfred* 543, 578, 596, 602, 604  
 Brussels 102, 363  
*Budissiner Nachrichten* 31  
 Budowsky, Brent 360  
 Bückeberg 560  
 Bülow, Bernhard von 319–22, 338–42, 345,  
     347, 357, 370–1, 393, 397, 399, 400, 405,  
     407–10, 412–13, 417–19, 421, 425–7,  
     430, 432, 434, 439, 444–5, 479, 484,  
     495–7, 499, 501, 525, 531, 544, 547–8,  
     551–2, 566, 591  
 Bülow Bloc 444–5, 484–7, 499, 510, 544,  
     548, 552, 566, 591  
*Bürgertum* (bourgeoisie), *see* class: upper-middle  
     classes (*Bürgertum*)  
 Burnley, J. Hume 74  
 Burgk family, von 249  
 Burgk-Roßthal, Arthur Dathe von 111  
 Burgk-Roßthal, Carl von 94  
 Burgsdorff, Carl von 50, 85  
 Burgstädt 500  
 Busch, Julius Hermann *Moritz* 34, 49, 55, 180  
 Cameroon 281  
 Canada 362, 624  
 Caprivi, Georg *Leo* von 240, 242–4, 256–8, 270,  
     272, 274–5, 277, 280–1, 314, 533, 555  
 Carius (police inspector, Chemnitz) 159–60  
 Carnot, Sadi 272, 277  
 Cartwright, Fairfax L. 428–9, 445  
 Catholicism and Catholic Church 14, 23–4, 92,  
     121–2, 141–2, 157, 199, 201–2, 206, 245,  
     323, 327, 341, 380, 385, 408, 426, 617,  
     *see also* German Center Party  
 Center Party, *see* German Center Party  
 Central German Farmers' Association 244  
 Chamberlain, Houston Stewart 206  
 Chemnitz 14, 20, 21, 31, 50, 83, 94, 117, 141,  
     160, 162–4, 178, 189, 192, 201–2, 208,  
     215–17, 223, 226, 255–6, 301, 304, 347,  
     351, 353, 360, 387–9, 393, 404, 415, 427,  
     438, 457, 465, 477–8, 491–3, 500, 517,  
     519, 523, 561–2, 589, 595, 607,  
     610, 626  
     Constitutional Electoral Association 50  
     municipal assembly 347  
     Municipal Electoral Association 50  
 “Chemnitz Rope Affair” 158–60, 174, 626  
*Chemnitzer Tageblatt* 455  
 Chesterton, G. K. 625  
 Chicago 272  
 Christian Conservatives 213  
 Christian Social Association (Dresden) 220  
 Christian Social Party 207, 214, 248, 264,  
     280, 365  
 Christianity 120, 224–5, 229, 247, 251–2, 254,  
     278, *see also* Catholicism and Catholic  
     Church; Protestantism and Protestant  
     Church  
 class  
     lower-middle classes (*Mittelstand*) 8, 10–11,  
         23, 31, 41, 127, 166, 189, 196–7, 203,  
         210, 216–17, 227, 246, 251–3, 260, 262,  
         267, 281, 285, 287, 312, 321, 340, 351,  
         353, 364–6, 379, 415, 420, 421, 430, 433,  
         438, 443, 448–9, 454, 457, 472–4, 480,  
         486, 495, 499, 500, 504–5, 515–16, 532,  
         534, 554, 556, 566, 584, 587, 621, 626  
     upper classes 189, 203, 367, 379, 423, 504,  
         619, 625  
     upper-middle classes (*Bürgertum*) 8–11,  
         22–3, 31, 96, 115, 125, 134, 137–9,  
         166, 170, 189, 197, 203, 240, 275,  
         278–84, 301, 334, 337, 340–1, 349,  
         358, 361, 365, 372, 388–9, 401–2,  
         408, 430, 433, 436, 443, 466, 481,  
         507, 521, 525, 533, 535–6, 542, 544,  
         556, 565–6, 569, 572, 579, 583, 587,  
         589, 618–19, 623  
     urban bourgeoisie (*Stadtbürgertum*) 22–3, 197  
     working classes 8, 11, 13, 22–3, 38, 41, 64,  
         93, 96–8, 105, 110, 120, 133, 137, 140,  
         148, 158, 167–8, 183, 203, 230, 233, 267,  
         285, 320, 326, 342–4, 361, 364, 379–80,  
         391, 402–8, 433, 450–1, 466, 479–80,  
         483, 487, 491, 494–9, 503–4, 507, 516,  
         520–1, 528–30, 534, 554, 577, 582,  
         595–7, 615–16, 619, 625

- Claß, Heinrich 454, 583, 586–90  
*If I Were the Kaiser* (1912) 583, 586–90  
 Cobbett, William 66  
 colonialism and German colonies 419, 424–5, 447, 567  
 Confederation of the Rhine 70  
 Connewitz 168  
 Conservative State Association for the Kingdom of Saxony 117, 120, 123, 200, 208, 215, 223, 227, 252, 261, 279, 349  
 Chemnitz 249  
*The Conservatives in the Struggle Against the Domination of Judaism and for the Preservation of the Mittelstand* (1892) 252  
 Dresden 208, 222–4, 247, 253, 277, 281, 451, 453  
 Dresden party congress (1892) 250–1, 311  
 Leipzig 50–1, 72, 119  
 Riesa 181  
 conservatives and conservatism 2, 20, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30–2, 35, 39, 41–6, 48–52, 61, 67, 70–5, 78, 80, 82, 87, 90, 92, 121, 127, 247, 250–1, 317, 327, 367, 370, 453, 499, *see also* German Conservative Party; Imperial- and Free Conservative Party  
*Conservatives Flugblatt für Sachsen* 208  
*Conservatives Vereinsblatt* 191  
 Constitutional-Federalist Electoral Association for Saxony 63  
*Constitutionelle Zeitung* 34, 49, 58, 76, 88, 102, 115–16  
 Conrad, Joseph 92  
 Cooper, Caroline Ethel 594  
 Copenhagen School of International Relations 623  
 Cornford, Francis M. 198  
 Coward, Noël 171  
 Crailsheim, Friedrich Krafft von 304  
 Craushaar, Friedrich Ernst Georg von 500–1  
 Crimmitschau 94, 164, 168, 208  
 Crispi, Francesco 272  
 Cronenthal, Luise Haenel von 24  
 Crowe, Eyre 428, 482, 499, 548  
 Crowe, Joseph Archer 34, 51, 59, 66, 72, 76, 132  
 Customs Union 51  
 Czech nationalism 364–5  
  
*Dabeim* 128  
 Dahrendorf, Ralf 616  
*Society and Democracy in Germany* (1965) 616  
*Daily Telegraph* Affair 440, 454, 485, 547, 579  
 Dallwitz, Hans von 584–5  
 Danes, Denmark 5, 572, 607  
 de Lagarde, Paul 213  
*German Writings* 213  
*Program for the Prussian Conservative Party* (1884) 213  
  
 Delbrück, Clemens (von) 549  
 Delbrück, Hans 302–3, 346, 368, 405, 552  
 demagogues, demagoguery 10, 206, 220, 227, 229, 234, 243, 251, 255–6, 257, 258, 268, 269, 283, 285, 341, 342, 345, 353, 417, 420, 449, 541, 554, 561, 586, 590, 625  
 Demmler, Adolf 137  
 Demmler, Carl 110  
 democracy 1, 3, 4–6, 10–12, 14–16, 32, 38, 47, 57, 77, 80, 95, 117, 153, 158, 171, 251, 270, 282, 293, 317–18, 321, 335, 354, 359–63, 367, 372, 375, 377–8, 383, 385, 387, 391, 419, 436, 445, 460–1, 466, 474, 476, 479–81, 485, 507, 533, 535–7, 543, 545–6, 549–50, 557, 567, 576, 582, 586, 592–4, 596, 613–14, 616–19, 621–9  
 Democratic Party (Saxony) 25  
 Democratic Workers' Association of Berlin 96  
 democratization 3–4, 6–7, 12, 14–15, 123, 129, 137, 251, 269, 298, 310, 314, 358–60, 362–3, 367, 372, 385, 387, 397, 413, 434, 460, 482, 535–7, 541, 550, 555, 567, 582, 584, 592, 601, 613–14, 617, 619–23, 626, 629  
 democrats 6, 10, 31, 38, 45, 63, 68, 91, 98, 142, 190, 387, 615, 619  
 Denning, Greg 482  
*Deutsch-Soziale Blätter* 218, 244  
*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 33–4  
*Deutsche Reform* 207, 210–11, 220  
*Deutsche Wacht* 210, 218, 301, 344–61  
*Deutsche Tageszeitung* 250, 327  
*Deutsches Adelsblatt* 205, 250  
*Deutsches Tageblatt* 205  
 Dewitz, Hermann von 586  
 Dippoldiswalde 176  
 Disraeli, Benjamin 71–2, 78, 318  
 Dittrich, Rudolf 608  
 Dohm, Hedwig 592  
 Dönhoff, Carl von 141–2, 151, 161–5, 183, 191, 214, 239–40, 268, 300, 312, 315–16, 327, 341, 342, 345, 356, 396, 399, 406  
*Dortmunder Anzeiger* 418  
 Dresden 1–2, 9, 14, 15, 21, 23, 26, 27, 34, 36, 50, 59, 78, 79, 82–3, 89, 90, 92, 94, 98–100, 102, 104, 107, 110, 112–18, 122, 127, 138–9, 141, 144, 148, 150, 157, 161–8, 174, 188–9, 190, 199–203, 207–12, 214–15, 217, 220, 222–3, 227–8, 231–4, 242, 244–6, 248–9, 260–2, 264–6, 268–9, 276, 281, 283, 289, 301, 304, 310, 312, 323, 326, 330, 347, 349, 355, 360, 365, 375–7, 382, 387–8, 394, 395–8, 400–1, 403, 406, 407, 417, 422, 427, 430, 433, 438–9, 445, 448, 452, 457, 465, 475, 477–8, 486, 492–4, 496, 498, 501, 523, 544, 561–2, 564, 568, 571, 589, 595, 598, 607–8, 626

- Chamber of Commerce 388  
 Electoral Association 100  
 Harmony Society 115  
 Jewish community 200  
 municipal assembly 220–1, 388  
 Municipal Association 50  
 municipal council 200, 220–1, 595  
 municipal elections 212, 220  
 Dresden Chapter for Women's Suffrage 591  
 Dresden Home-Owners Association 212, 220  
 Dresden Lawyers' Association 426  
 Dresden National Committee 418, 426, 431  
 Dresden United National Committees 568  
 Dresden Polytechnic 100  
 Dresden Royal Conservatory 247  
 Dresden Uprising (1849) 23, 25, 26, 30, 32, 35, 53  
*Dresdner Anzeiger* 281  
*Dresdner Journal* 49–50, 191  
*Dresdner Nachrichten* 161, 166, 211, 221, 255, 261, 302, 319, 601  
*Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* 601  
*Dresdner Woche* 564  
*Dresdner Zeitung* 300, 352, 398  
 Du Bois, W. E. B. 259, 261  
 Dühring, Eugen 215
- East Elbia 330  
 East Prussia 97  
*École libre des sciences politiques* 367  
 Economic Union 574  
 Ehrenstein, Georg Otto von 382–6  
 Einsiedel, Kurt von 52, 139, 150–1, 220–1  
 Eichmann, Friedrich von 59–60, 65–6  
 Eisenstuck, Bernhard 69–70  
 elections, *see* Reichstag elections; Landtag (Prussian) elections; Landtag (Saxon) elections  
 Electoral Association of Private Salaried Employees 426  
 Electoral Association of the Antisemitic German Social Party for the Kingdom of Saxony 227  
 electoral culture 7–8, 79, 178, 230, 248, *see also* democracy; democratization  
 Elbe River 13, 21, 396  
 Emanuel, Rahm 335, 624  
 Engel, Heinrich 205  
 Engels, Friedrich 5, 38, 45, 127, 230–1, 234, 323, 330  
 Engl, Josef Benedikt 563  
 England, *see* Great Britain  
 Erdmannsdorff, Heinrich von 255  
 Erfurt 244  
 Erzberger, Matthias 418, 566, 597  
 Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) 21, 56, 69, 223, 356, 510, 519  
 Eulenburg, Botho zu 275, 278–80, 291  
 Eulenburg, Friedrich zu 15, 43, 112, 131  
 Eulenburg, Philipp zu 179, 279, 413, 453, 485, 594  
 European Union 624  
 Everling, Otto 426
- Fabrice, Georg Friedrich *Alfred* von 28, 88, 98, 114, 122–3, 139, 167, 177, 184–5, 190, 231, 238–40, 274  
 Fahrenbach, Ludwig 421, 473  
 Fairbairn, Brett 619  
 Falkenhayn, Arthur von 370  
 Falter, Jürgen 528  
 Fechenbach-Laudenbach, Friedrich *Karl* von 205, 215  
 Federal Council 53, 132, 144, 180, 184, 275, 277–9, 281, 600  
 Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) 394  
 Federalist-Constitutionalist Union 62  
 Finance Reform crisis (1909) 484, 487, 493, 495, 499, 501, 533, 544  
 Finland 5  
 First World War 10, 362, 482, 531, 537, 546, 551, 592, 593–614, 622  
 Fischer, Edmund 335, 354  
 Fleißner, Hermann 454, 484, 505, 533, 540, 597, 602, 604, 607, 611, 612  
 Florence 102  
 Förster, Bernhard 219  
 Förster (mayor of Hohnstein) 276  
 Försternberg (police inspector, Leipzig) 308–10, 324, 457  
 Försterling, Friedrich Wilhelm *Emil* 52, 64  
 Forgách von Ghymes und Gács, Johann 581  
 Frälsdorf, Karl *Julius* 540–1, 545, 594, 602, 611  
 France 88, 103, 272, 295, 359–63, 407, 579, 607, 617  
     National Assembly 100  
 Franco-German War (1870–71) 88, 93, 95, 100  
 Frank, Ludwig 581  
 Frankfurt am Main 40, 61, 134, 360  
 Frankfurt Constitution 25, 61, *see also* suffrage: Frankfurt (1848)  
 Frankfurt Parliament (1848–49) 25, 45, 66, 81, 85–6, *see also* revolutions of 1848–49  
 Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria 365–6  
 Fraustadt, Friedrich August 564–5, 569  
 Free Conservative Party, *see* Imperial- and Free Conservative Party  
 Frege-Weltzien, Arnold Woldemar von 118–20, 205, 208, 213, 223, 250, 314  
 Freiberg 94, 169, 226, 560  
 French Revolution 5, 10, 96, 224, 339–40, 363, 402, 413, 628  
 Freytag, Otto 149–50, 159–60, 192  
 Freytag, Gustav 33–6  
     *What is to Become of Saxony?* (1866) 35  
 Friedrich I, Grand Duke of Baden, 125

- Friedrich III, King of Prussia, German Kaiser 44, 59, 89, 180
- Friedrich August III, King of Saxony 222, 321–2, 365, 397, 399–400, 406, 408, 427, 432, 437, 442, 455, 457, 533, 542, 545, 560, 580–1, 608–10
- Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia 178
- Friesen, Richard von 27–8, 39, 45–6, 47, 51, 60–2, 65–8, 71–3, 75–82, 85–9, 99, 102–4, 114, 116, 122–3, 138–9, 240, 461, 594
- Friesen-Rötha, Heinrich von 118–20, 201, 205–6, 208–9, 213–14, 225, 227–8, 237, 243–4, 247, 250–1, 253–6, 258, 260, 262–3, 267, 269, 283, 289, 314, 404, 555, 621
- Conservative! A Warning Call at the Eleventh Hour* (1892) 254–5
- [Anon.], *Honor the Truth!* (1893) 255, 258
- On the Necessity of Cooperation Between Religious and State Authorities in the Social-Ethical Realm* (1886) 213
- Perspectives for a Revised Conservative Program* (1891) 253
- Fritsch, Theodor 214–19, 223, 226–7, 244–5, 247–9, 259, 264, 421, 473, 591, 626
- Antisemitic Catechism* 215, 219
- Brennende Fragen* 217
- Handbook of the Jewish Question* 219
- Fritzsch, Curt 420–1
- Fritzsch, Friedrich Wilhelm 52, 179
- Frymann, Daniel (pseud.), *see* Claß, Heinrich
- Fürth 500
- Gageur, Karl 295
- Suffrage Reform in the Reich and in Baden* (1893) 295
- Gebattel, Konstantin von 590–1
- General German Antisemitic Union 226
- General German School Association for the Preservation of Germandom Abroad 310
- General German Workers' Association (ADAV) 37, 52, 55–6, 58, 63–4, 93–4, 97, 109, 113
- General Union to Combat the Jews (Chemnitz) 216
- Georg, King of Saxony 238, 321, 342–4, 347–8, 353
- Georgi, Arthur 289, 291, 304
- Georgi, Otto Robert 188, 285, 289, 291, 382–6
- On Reform of the Suffrage for the Second Saxon Chamber* (1906) 383
- Georgi, Robert 382
- Gerber, Carl (von) 52, 54, 61, 62, 67, 87, 122–3, 183–4, 240
- Gerlach, Helmuth von 171, 337
- Gerlach, Ernst Ludwig von 598
- German Center Party 86, 113, 121–2, 126, 133, 154–5, 157, 181, 188, 235, 265, 271, 311–13, 319–20, 323, 327, 330, 340, 364, 412, 415, 418, 425, 427–9, 484–5, 496, 554, 566, 572, 574, 576, 581, 597, 600
- German Civil War (1866), *see* Austro-Prussian War
- German Commercial Employees Union 426
- German Confederation 26, 40
- German Conservative Party 53–9, 60, 62, 63–6, 67, 69, 72, 77, 79, 81–4, 86–8, 91, 100–1, 107, 109–11, 113–14, 116–20, 123, 125, 127, 129–30, 133, 135, 137–9, 145–7, 151–6, 158, 160–4, 176–7, 181–8, 191–3, 196, 198, 200–11, 212–14, 219–22, 224–9, 230, 234–5, 237, 240, 242–5, 247–69, 270, 273–85, 288–9, 291, 293–5, 298–9, 301–3, 305–6, 310–13, 316–17, 319, 321–3, 327–30, 334, 338–50, 353–7, 367, 371, 374, 382, 385–7, 391, 397, 404, 406–8, 411–12, 415, 418–22, 428, 431, 434, 437–42, 444, 446–9, 451–2, 454–7, 465–7, 473, 475, 478–80, 484–7, 491, 495–505, 507, 510–14, 523, 525–7, 531–5, 539–44, 546–7, 550–8, 560–2, 565–6, 569–70, 572, 574–5, 578, 581–3, 585, 591, 593, 595–6, 598–9, 603, 611, 613, 624, 626, *see also* conservatives and conservatism
- Committee of Eleven 118, 250, 310, 408
- Committee of Twelve 223
- Electoral Association 213
- Tivoli Congress (1892) 250–3, 256–8
- German Constitution, *see* Reich Constitution
- German Customs Union 35
- German Democratic Republic (East Germany) 12, 394
- German Empire, proclamation of (1871) 88
- German Fatherland Party 599, 608–9
- German History in Documents and Images* (GHDI) 16, 21, 26, 36, 39, 40, 43, 46, 63, 93, 95, 96, 97, 102, 104, 106, 116, 117, 124, 133, 138, 153, 199, 200, 209, 211, 213, 216, 218, 231, 232, 234, 252, 416, 457, 586, 595, 597
- German League 310
- German League to Combat Female Emancipation, *see* *Anti-Liga*
- German National Commercial Employees Union 310
- German National Union Germania 227
- German Patriots' League 609
- German People's Association (Berlin) 219
- German People's Party 38
- German Progressive Association 116
- German Progressive Party 32, 38, 48, 52–3, 55, 57, 58, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 76, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 100–2, 107, 109, 111, 116, 123, 125, 126, 127, 133, 137, 138–9, 141, 145–7, 148, 153, 154–5, 161, 164, 166, 168, 172, 181, 187–8, 190–2, 193, 200,

- 226, 259, 261, 263, 268, 279, 283–4, 289, 298–9, 303, 307, 312, 316, 447, 499, 532, 551, *see also* liberals, left, and left liberalism; Progressive People's Party
- German Radical Party 153, 188, 190–1, 208, 241, 260, 286, *see also* liberals, left, and left liberalism; Radical People's Party
- German Radical State Association for Saxony 191–2
- German Reform Association 204, 221, 227, 248–9
- Chemnitz 215
- Dresden 210–12, 220, 223–4
- Leipzig 219, 245
- German Reform Party 210, 259–64, 266–9, 284, 327–8, 419–20, 505, 526–7
- German Reich Association (Dresden) 115–16, 123, 138, 303, 312, 497
- German Social Association (Chemnitz) 249
- German Social Party 227–8, 246, 248–9, 259–61, 263–4, 328, 420
- German Social Reform Association (Leipzig) 245, 248
- German Social Reform Party 310
- German Society of Nobles 205, 250
- German Southwest Africa 419, 447, 560
- German *Völkisch* Party 599
- Gersdorf 169
- Gersdorf, Wilhelm August 77
- Gefßler, Ernst von 81
- Geyer, Friedrich 149, 233, 276, 334, 395, 608
- Ghent 363
- Giese, Ernst 422, 576, 598
- Gilbert, W. S. 584
- Giron, Richard ("Giron Affair") 321, 341, 347, 422
- Gise, Maximilian von 59
- Gladstone, William 48
- Glagau, Otto 210, 218, 224
- Glauchau 31, 36, 164, 175, 231, 254, 523
- Glöß, Ferdinand Woldemar 245
- Gneist, Heinrich *Rudolf* von 79
- Göhre, Paul 335
- Gohlis 168
- Goldstein, Hermann 135, 298, 306, 320, 356, 398, 438–9, 441–2, 455
- Gorbachev, Mikhail 39
- Goetz, Ferdinand 63, 228
- Gradnauer, Georg 312, 335, 354
- Gräfe, Heinrich 329, 576, 599
- Grant Duff, Arthur (A. C.) 538, 548
- Graser, Julius 569–70
- "Gray International" 213
- Great Britain 38, 59, 78, 89, 272, 320, 359–62, 371, 387, 407, 505, 579, 581, 617, 624
- army 320
- Board of Trade 516
- colonies 363
- First Reform Act (1832) 304, 361, 436
- Foreign Office 110, 503, 544, 548
- Fourth Reform Act (1918) 361, 503
- parliament 71, 360, 544
- Primrose League 387
- Second Reform Act (1867) 78, 361
- Third Reform Act (1884/85) 361, 503
- Grenz, Ernst 565
- Grenzboten, Die* 33, 34, 35, 39, 101, 116, 555
- Grey, Edward 371–2
- Grimma 119
- Großenhain 162, 562
- Guelphs 572
- Günther, Oskar 438, 442, 502, 523, 532, 543, 557, 565, 569–70, 611
- Haberkorn, Daniel Ferdinand *Ludwig* 39, 52, 87, 101
- Habsburg monarchy 365
- Hacking, Ian 79
- Haller, Johannes 594
- Hamann, Otto 341
- Hamburg 115, 134, 141–2, 164, 166, 227, 245, 273, 285, 296, 298, 304, 360, 365, 367, 371, 381–3, 487, 528, 580, 607
- Hammer, Der* 591
- Hammerstein-Schwartow, Wilhelm von 213–14, 225, 243, 264
- Hanover 34, 62, 123,
- Hansa League 556
- Hard Labor Bill 272–3
- Harden, Maximilian 453
- Hartley, L. P. 614
- Hartwig, Gustav 220–1, 269, 284
- Hasse, Ernst 127–8, 421–2, 587
- Hasselmann, Wilhelm 179
- Hausen, Heinrich von 231–2, 248, 260–1
- Hausen, Max von 409
- Hentze, Otto 218
- Heidelberg 101
- Heimat* movement 246
- Heine, Thomas Theodor 281, 397, 546–7, 550, 622
- Heine, Wolfgang 573
- Heink, Erich Friedrich Albert *Georg* 376, 390, 406, 408–9, 432, 437, 447, 450, 456, 460, 461, 468–72, 477, 497, 523, 626
- Heink, Josepha 432
- Heinze, Karl *Rudolf* 556–8, 610–13
- Heldt, Max 604, 611
- Helfferich, Karl 606
- Helldorff-Bedra, Otto von 213, 225, 243, 256, 258
- Hepner, Adolf 99, 106–7
- Herero and Nama genocide 419
- Hermann, Ernst 599
- Herrfurth, Ernst *Ludwig* 291
- Hertling, Georg von 597, 601, 608
- Hessen 34, 202, 219, 226–7, 244, 360, 580

- Hettner, Franz 438, 442, 510, 542, 602, 604, 608
- Heydebrand und der Lasa, Ernst von 223, 412–13, 486, 551–3, 557, 559–60
- High Treason Trial (1872) 99
- Hirschberg, Karl Richard 70
- Hitler, Adolf 10, 216, 218, 519, 616, 627
- Hödel, Max 132
- Hoffmann, Franz 355
- Hoffmann, Stanley 616
- Hofmann, Hugo 478
- Hofmannsthal, Hugo von 451
- Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Chlodwig zu 272–3, 280–1, 291, 299, 311, 399, 408, 504, 533
- Hohenthal und Bergen, Karl Adolf Philip Wilhelm von 256, 342, 376, 385, 390–1, 393, 405–7, 409, 419, 426–7, 429, 431–4, 435–7, 439–43, 446–9, 451–3, 455–7, 460–1, 463, 466–9, 473–5, 480, 482, 484, 499, 533
- Hohenstein 168, 175
- Holocaust 3, 10
- Hopf, Friedrich 426, 571
- Horn, Georg 176
- Hosang, J. 257
- “Hottentot election,” *see* Reichstag elections: 1907
- Hubertusburg castle 107
- Hübel, Friedrich *Gustav* 150
- Hübschmann, Johannes 389
- hyper-inflation of 1923 531
- Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig) 559
- Imperial- and Free Conservative Party 57, 62, 64, 111–12, 113, 126, 152, 153, 154, 155, 214, 235, 242, 265, 272, 299, 313, 320, 330, 413, 428, 499, 572, 574, 576, *see also* conservatives and conservatism
- Imperial League against Social Democracy 10, 412, 413, 417, 420–1, 425–6, 430, *see also* anti-socialists and anti-socialist sentiment
- imperialism 246, 419, 485
- Independent Committee for a German Peace 608
- Independent Social Democratic Party 594, 597–8, 603, 611–13
- Industrial Code (1869) 95
- industrialization 3, 13, 21, 331, *see also* urbanization; urban-rural divide
- Italy 189, 272, 296
- Jacoby, Johann 107, 113
- Jäckel, Hermann 570
- Japan 79
- Jaurès, Jean 354
- Jefferson, Thomas 360
- Jellinek, Georg 376–8, 383, 390–1
- General Theory of the State* (1900) 376
- Jerusalem 224
- Jesuits 186, 321
- Jewish emancipation (1869) 211, 244, 248, 252, 587, 627
- “Jewish Question” 198, 210–12, 215–19, 225–8, 243, 247, 251–4, 259–60, 268, 311, 590, *see also* antisemites and antisemitism
- Jews 9, 10, 23, 25, 69, 74, 92, 185–6, 199–208, 211–12, 217, 221, 223–5, 228–9, 245, 247, 252–4, 258, 314, 365–6, 556, 584, 589–90, 619, 624, 626–8, *see also* Judaism eastern European 245, 624
- Johann, King of Saxony 24, 27–9, 36, 50, 59, 60, 85, 88
- Johnson, Lyndon B. 59
- Jordan, Max 34
- Joseph, Hermann 35
- Judaism 210, 228, 247, 252, 255, 263, 624, *see also* Jews
- Junck, Hermann 606, 610, 626
- Junck, Johannes 576
- Junkers 10, 86, 118, 207, 226, 243, 267, 320, 372, 445, 496, 551, 579, 621
- Juvenal 121
- Kaden, August 149, 170, 312
- “Kardorff compromise” (1902) 320
- Kardorff, Wilhelm von 320
- Kartell, Kartell parties
- Reich 152–3, 156, 180, 182, 205, 228, 230–6, 244, 251, 256, 259–64, 267–8, 312, 316, 326–8, 346–8, 386, 393, 422
- Saxony 187–9, 197, 223, 225–6, 240–1, 283–92, 299, 305, 318–23, 340–3, 355–6, 419, 430, 570, 576, 582, 622, 626
- Kassel 226–7
- Kautsky, Karl 329, 354
- Kayser, Max 170
- Keim, August 420
- Kessler, Harry 451
- King, Stephen 244
- “Kitzing, The” 33–4, 37, 51
- “*Kladderadatsch*” 365, 543, 615
- Kladderadatsch* (journal) 44
- Klar, Ernst 326
- Klein, Thomas 172
- Kleines Mühlenjournal* 217
- Kleist, Heinrich von 572
- Prinz von Homburg* 572
- Klinger, Max 451
- Koch, Heinrich Theodor 69–70
- Koch, Carl Wilhelm *Otto* 32
- Koch, Walter 29, 538, 544, 611, 613
- Köller, Ernst von 273
- Königgrätz, Battle of (1866) 12, 26, 27, 29, 31, 45
- Königsberg 278, 375

- Könneritz, Leonçe Robert von 63, 77, 240  
 Könneritz, Richard von 348  
 Könneritz, Rudolf von 60–2  
 Kolb, Wilhelm 579  
*Konservatives Handbuch* (1892) 247  
 Koppenfels, Heinrich Max von 232  
 Kottwitz, Obrist 572  
 Krause, Paul 369  
*Kreuzzeitung* 57, 204, 213, 264, 547, 556  
*Kreuzzeitung* Group 213–14, 225, 243  
 Krille, Otto 325–6, 329  
 Kühlmorgen, Friedrich 438, 442  
 Kühne, Thomas 7  
 Külz, Wilhelm 560–1  
*Kulturkampf* 117, 121–4, 153, 218, 256, 418
- Lässig, Simone 460  
 Landsberg, Friedrich von 46  
 Landtag (Prussian) 40–1, 43, 59, 90, 180, 211, 213, 308, 368–72, 407, 574, 585, *see also* Prussia; suffrage: Landtag (Prussian)  
   Herrenhaus (upper house) 40, 85, 86, 372, 445, 479, 582, 600, 603, 605  
   House of Deputies (lower house) 40, 68, 74, 197, 212, 278, 290, 407, 550, 600, 603  
 Landtag (Prussian) elections 43, 57, 369, 370, 405, 547  
 Landtag (Saxon) 2, 24, 25, 26, 32, 33, 37, 38, 48, 51–2, 67, 69, 75–6, 80–6, 92, 99, 107, 148–50, 152, 157, 169, 174, 178–9, 192–8, 211, 220, 233, 239, 253, 261, 276, 279–80, 282–4, 290, 298–9, 301, 303–5, 314–15, 334, 346–8, 351–7, 374–92, 395, 397, 399–400, 402, 404–10, 419, 431, 435, 438, 441, 445, 456, 460, 500, 582–3, 591, 594, 601–3, 626, *see also* suffrage: Landtag (Saxon)  
   caucuses 75, 145–9, 151, 197, 268–9, 283, 304–6, 316, 349–50, 356–7, 444, 452, 480, 532, 539, 550  
   Committee of Nine 440  
   Constitutional Committee 600–1, 603–4, 608, 610  
   coup d'état against (1850) 25  
   Finance Committee 540  
   First Chamber (upper house) 25, 39, 68, 70, 72–3, 74, 76, 85, 120, 211, 276, 279, 296, 300, 303, 345, 350, 355, 383, 405, 410–11, 413, 438, 447, 475, 479, 541–3, 545, 550, 561, 582, 597, 601–2, 612  
   Joint Committee on the State Debt 315  
   Second Chamber (lower house) 25, 39, 74–7, 79–80, 114, 178, 187, 193, 200, 276, 279, 282, 289, 291, 294–5, 300, 334, 345, 350, 376, 406, 410, 440–1, 443, 463, 475, 479, 534, 538–44, 594, 600, 610, 612  
   Suffrage Committee 437–43, 449–50, 455, 463, 468–9, 473, 532  
 Landtag (Saxon) constituencies (big city) 149, 241, 286, 465, 477, 506–10, 521, 523, 526  
   Chemnitz 506  
   Dresden 506, 510, 528  
   Leipzig 498, 499, 506, 528  
   Plauen 506  
   Zwickau 506  
 Landtag (Saxon) constituencies (other urban)  
   75, 350, 465, 506–10, 521, 523, 526, 528, 530  
   1: Zittau 510, 512–15, 528  
   5: Dippoldiswalde 75, 477–8, 510  
   6: Freiberg 150  
   12: Borna 507  
   13: Rochlitz 500–1  
   14: Meerane 109, 528  
   16: Crimmitschau 495  
   21: Reichenbach 495  
   22: Netzschkau 495, 506  
 Landtag (Saxon) constituencies (rural) 75, 83, 148, 241, 347, 350, 465, 506–10, 521, 523, 527–8  
   1: Zittau 83, 354  
   10: Dresden 150  
   16: Nossen 150  
   22: Taucha 75, 507  
   23: Leipzig I 83, 149, 167  
   24: Leipzig II 83, 149–50  
   25: Borna 507  
   30: Chemnitz 84, 149  
   36: Stollberg 148–9  
   37: Hartenstein 356  
   40: Zwickau 84, 149  
   44: Plauen 506  
   46: Dresden-Neustadt-Pirna 523  
   47: Zwickau-Chemnitz 523  
 Landtag (Saxon) elections 96, 107, 140, 145, 167, 170, 175, 180, 186, 241, 304, 343, 349, 405, 478  
   1866 48  
   1869 47, 78–80, 82–4, 90–1, 196–7, 464  
   1871 107–9, 128  
   1873 87, 107–9, 128  
   1875 87, 108–9, 128  
   1877 120, 140, 145–9, 192  
   1879 145–50, 159, 174, 192, 209  
   1881 145–9, 190, 212  
   1883 145, 147, 149  
   1885 145, 147, 149, 191  
   1887 145, 147, 149, 167, 191, 226  
   1889 192, 226, 231, 241, 306, 464  
   1891 239–42, 268, 306, 309, 464  
   1893 268, 289, 306, 464  
   1895 282, 285, 289–90, 302, 306, 384, 464  
   1897 290, 306, 309, 357, 464  
   1899 290, 306, 357, 464  
   1901 306, 357, 464  
   1903 306, 340, 344, 347, 357, 422, 464, 468, 483, 493  
   1905 306, 355–6, 439, 464, 468, 493  
   1907 306, 464, 468, 493, 577



- Landtag (Saxon) elections (*cont.*)  
 1909 7, 319, 464, 471, 477, 479, 482, 483,  
 484, 491–6, 500–14, 517–36, 541, 547,  
 552, 554–5, 577, 596, 622
- Langbehn, Julius 245
- Lange, Friedrich 310
- Langhammer, Max 422, 438, 450, 542
- Lasker, Eduard 138, 205, 211
- Lassalle, Ferdinand 37–8
- Lassalleans, *see* General German Workers' Association (ADAV)
- League of German-Jewish Communities 211–12
- League of Saxon Veterans' Associations 166
- Lear, Edward 505
- Lehmann, Emil 200–1, 203, 211–12, 221, 626
- Leipzig 14, 21, 23, 26, 31, 32, 33–9, 50, 54,  
 55–6, 69, 71, 83, 87, 89, 94, 98–9, 107,  
 110, 115, 117–20, 134, 139–45, 151, 153,  
 162–5, 167–8, 177, 188–9, 191, 196, 199,  
 201–4, 209, 211–12, 214, 217–20, 223,  
 227, 233, 238, 248–9, 283, 285–9, 302–3,  
 308–10, 323–4, 343, 347, 349, 355, 360,  
 382–3, 387–9, 394–5, 401, 422, 433, 447,  
 451, 453–4, 457–9, 465, 477, 492–3, 498,  
 500, 506, 517, 521, 523, 530, 559, 563,  
 564, 573, 589, 595–6, 607–8, 626
- Association of Reich Loyalists 115
- Citizens' Committee 168
- City Association 168
- city council 97, 285–8
- municipal assembly 51, 54, 286–90, 389
- municipal elections 286–8, 308
- police 309
- Statistical Office 127
- trade fairs 14
- Truth and Justice Association 50–1
- Leipzig Agitation District (SPD) 493
- Leipzig Home-Owners Association 287
- Leipzig, University of 14, 222, 304
- Leipziger Bank 341
- Leipziger, Der. Illustrierte Wochenschrift* 206
- Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* 429, 573
- Leipziger Tageblatt* 152, 177, 286, 548
- Leipziger Volkszeitung* 286, 444
- Leipziger Zeitung* 35, 49–50, 58, 80, 109,  
 295–6, 314, 501
- Lengefeld 478
- Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) 37, 593
- Lepsius, M. Rainer 14
- Leuschner, Friedrich *Ludwig* 175
- Lex Heinze 271
- Liberal Association (Dresden) 401
- liberal nationalists, *see* National Liberal Party
- liberals and liberalism 2, 11, 13–15, 23–5,  
 30–6, 41–6, 47–8, 50, 57, 59, 61, 67, 71,  
 73, 76, 78, 80–8, 90, 92, 109, 118, 124,  
 132, 135–8, 151, 154, 182, 186–95, 199,  
 204, 206–10, 225, 228–9, 245, 251–3,  
 255, 267, 270–1, 273, 280–1, 299–303,  
 307, 317, 328, 347, 349–50, 362, 366–7,  
 370, 391, 499, 547, 553, 569, 575, 624,  
 627, *see also* National Liberal Party
- liberals, left, and left liberalism 121, 124, 133,  
 137, 145–8, 151, 153, 156–7, 168, 185–7,  
 190–2, 196–7, 228, 231, 234–5, 242, 261,  
 263, 265, 285, 302, 313, 320, 323, 327–8,  
 330, 334, 356, 369, 385–6, 398, 415, 418,  
 421, 426, 428, 438, 441–2, 447, 455, 484,  
 495–6, 499–501, 507, 510, 514, 523, 530,  
 532, 535, 543, 553–4, 557, 561, 564, 566,  
 570, 572–4, 578, 581, 592, 599, 618,  
*see also* German Progressive Party; German  
 Radical Party; Progressive People's Party;  
 Radical People's Party
- Liberals, Old 62
- Liberals, Young 356, 386, 440, 544
- Liebermann von Sonnenberg, Max 214–15,  
 218–19, 221, 223, 226–7, 244, 248, 264,  
 310, 328, 420
- Liebert, Eduard (von) 413, 420–1, 426, 554,  
 576, 583
- Liebknecht, Karl 338, 598, 607
- Liebknecht, Wilhelm 36–9, 45, 52, 55–6, 63–4,  
 76, 83, 93–101, 104, 106–11, 140,  
 148–51, 160–4, 170–1, 174–6, 182, 192,  
 212, 226, 235–7, 278, 301, 338, 523, 618
- Liman, Paul 429
- Lindenau 168–9
- Lindenau, Bernhard von 23
- Lipinski, Robert *Richard* 564, 596, 598–9
- Lippe, Clemens zur 608
- Lippe, Ferdinand zu 261
- Local Government Act (Saxony) 86
- Löbau 416
- Loebell, Friedrich Wilhelm von 408, 413,  
 415, 417, 419, 425, 444, 485–6, 555–9,  
 573, 585
- London 102, 272, 503
- Lorenz, Max 36
- Lucius von Ballhausen, Robert 179
- Ludwig II, King of Bavaria 88
- Ludwig-Wolf, Leo 288, 389, 460
- Lübeck 360, 371, 381, 528, 580
- Lueger, Karl 365–6
- Lugau-Oelsnitz 150
- Luise of Tuscany, Crown Princess of  
 Saxony 321–2, 340, 347, 422
- Luitpold, Prince Regent of Bavaria 279, 372
- Luther, Martin 418
- Lutheran Church, *see* Protestantism and  
 Protestant Church
- Luxemburg, Rosa 308, 363, 573, 578, 607
- Macdonald, John A. 72
- Madai, Guido von 112, 134, 139–43, 164, 168
- Mahler, Gustav 411
- Main River 13

- Majority Social Democratic Party 595–7,  
599–600, 602–3, 605, 607–8, 611, 613
- Mangler, Otto 604
- Mann, Heinrich 246
- Mann, Thomas 246
- Manteuffel, Otto von 310
- Marquis, Don 538
- Marr, Wilhelm 209–11, 215, 217  
*From the Jewish Theater of War* 209  
*Golden Rats and Red Mice* 209  
*Open Your Eyes, German Newspaper Readers!* 209  
*The Victory of Jewry over Germanism* 209
- Marseillaise 141, 397, 402, 564
- Martin, Rudolf 222
- Marx, Karl 5, 38, 99, 193, 323, 363
- Marxism and Marxists 10, 93, 207, 229, 335,  
394, *see also* socialism and socialists
- mass politics 3, 181, 186, 207, 218, 229, 242,  
353, 539, 621, *see also* democracy;  
democratization; electoral culture
- Mathy, Karl 34
- Mecklenburg-Schwerin 580
- Mecklenburg-Strelitz 580
- Medingen 223
- Meerane 164, 168, 189, 539
- Mehnert, Johann *Karl* 206, 222–4
- Mehnert, Wilhelm *Maximilian* 432–3,  
569–71, 604
- Mehnert, Karl *Paul* 222–5, 227, 247, 250–1,  
253, 267, 269, 276–7, 281–5, 288–93,  
297–9, 301, 304, 305, 310, 314–16, 319,  
340–2, 346, 348, 350, 354–8, 382, 393,  
395, 399–400, 405, 408–13, 418–22, 426,  
430, 432–4, 437–8, 441, 444, 451–4, 456,  
467, 473, 479, 486, 497, 498, 525,  
539–41, 555–8, 564–70, 582, 598, 608,  
612, 621
- “Mehnert’s Law” (1896), *see* suffrage and  
suffrage reform: Landtag (Saxon), law of  
1896
- Mehring, Franz 152, 401
- Meineke, Dr. 368–70
- Meißen 21, 70, 162, 169, 220, 223, 249, 253,  
494, 565
- Mencken, H. L. 282, 625
- Mengers, Christian 20
- Merkel, Anton *Robert* 495, 542
- Merz, Bruno *Oswin* 291–7, 300, 306, 316,  
351, 626
- Metternich, Clemens von 436
- Metzsch-Reichenbach, Karl *Georg* Levin  
von 240–2, 254, 266–9, 274–6, 283, 285,  
288–94, 297, 299–307, 311–12, 315–16,  
319, 321–2, 328, 334, 342–51, 353–4,  
356–7, 373, 375–6, 382, 385, 391, 393,  
395–400, 404–6, 409, 419, 430, 437, 439,  
443, 446, 448, 588
- Meyer, Georg 367–8, 378, 556
- Das Parlamentarische Wahlrecht* (1901)  
367–8
- Michaelis, Georg 597, 601, 608
- Michels, Robert 282
- Millers’ Technical Bureau (Leipzig) 217
- Minckwitz, Heinrich *Eduard* 53
- Minogue, Kenneth 394
- Mittelstand*, *see* class: lower-middle classes  
(*Mittelstand*)
- Molkenbuhr, Hermann 581
- Moltke, Friedrich von 369, 547
- Moltke, Kuno von 453
- Mommsen, Karl 573
- Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat) 360
- Montgelas, Eduard de Garnerin von 345–6,  
396, 429, 431, 452–3, 504
- Monument to the Battle of Nations  
(Leipzig) 609
- Most, Johann 137
- Motteler, Julius 137
- Mühlmann, Robert 181
- Münster, Otto zu 151
- Munich 285, 428, 445
- Napoleon I, Emperor of France 5, 23, 33
- Napoleon III, Emperor of France 95, 363
- Nation, Die* 579
- National Gallery (Berlin) 34
- National Liberal Party 31–2, 34–6, 45, 47,  
49–51, 52, 53–4, 56, 58, 63–5, 67, 76, 77,  
80, 82, 83–7, 100–2, 107, 109, 113–15,  
116–17, 121, 122–4, 127, 129–30, 133,  
137–9, 141, 145–7, 151–6, 161, 168, 172,  
175, 177, 186, 187–9, 191–2, 197–8, 203,  
205, 207–9, 213–14, 225, 227–9, 230,  
234–5, 242, 259–60, 262–5, 268, 279,  
281, 283–7, 289, 295, 298–303, 307,  
311–16, 320, 327–30, 338–41, 345–7,  
349–50, 352–6, 368–9, 377–9, 383–6,  
391, 398, 405, 407, 411, 413, 415,  
418–19, 421–2, 428, 431, 436–43,  
446–50, 453, 455–7, 465, 467, 473–5,  
480, 484–5, 493, 495, 496, 498–507,  
510–13, 515, 523, 526–7, 532, 535,  
539–46, 548–4, 556–8, 560–2, 564–7,  
569–70, 572–6, 578, 581–6, 594–8, 600,  
602–3, 605–8, 611–13, 618, 626
- National Liberals of Leipzig under the Microscope  
of Public Opinion, The So-Called* 54
- National Party 250
- National Social Association 312, 328, 330, 386
- National-Zeitung* 125
- Nationalliberale Blätter* 586
- Nationalliberale Korrespondenz* 553
- Nationalliberales Vereinsblatt* 502
- nationalism and nationalists 81, 99, 246–7,  
364–5, 393, 419, 430
- radical 16, 314, 319, 341, 393, 427, 430,  
438, 586, 589, 591, 608, 621

- Naumann, Friedrich 312, 369  
 Navy League 412, 420, 425–6  
 Nazi Party 8, 216, 218, 519, 528, 531, 561, 628  
 Nazism 10, 616, 618, 627–8  
 Netherlands 607  
*Neue Frankfurter Zeitung* 39  
*Neue Preussische (Kreuz-) Zeitung* 30  
*Neue Reichszeitung* 117, 207–9, 247  
*Neue Welt, Die* 124  
*Neue Zeit, Die* 304, 337, 354, 356, 378, 454, 505, 554  
 New Zealand 362  
 Newmann, Henry P. 383  
 Niendorf, Martin Anton 204  
 Niethammer, Ludwig *Albert* Julius 300  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 215–17  
 Nikolsburg, Preliminary Peace of (1866) 26  
 Nitzsche, August *Emil* 577, 604, 611  
 Nobiling, Karl 132, 134  
*Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 424, 554  
 North German Confederation 20, 23, 27, 30, 36, 46, 50, 53–4, 56–8, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66–70, 73, 88–90, 96, 211  
 Norway 224  
 Nossen 301  
 Nostitz-Wallwitz, Alfred von 382–7, 437, 451–4, 541, 610, 626  
 Nostitz-Wallwitz, Helene von 383, 451  
 Nostitz-Wallwitz, Hermann von 28, 51, 68, 70, 72, 73, 79, 81, 85, 98, 101, 103–5, 107–8, 113, 116, 122, 124–5, 127, 139–42, 144–5, 151–2, 158, 164–5, 174, 177–80, 190, 211, 232–3, 237, 239–40, 276, 315, 347, 451, 461  
 Nostitz-Wallwitz, Oswald von 171, 175, 177–8, 315, 382  
  
 Obama, Barack 335, 624  
*Oberlausitzer Volkszeitung* 561  
 Oehmichen-Choren, Ernst Friedrich *Wilhelm* von 52  
 Oer, Maximilian von 565  
 Oertel, Georg 247, 250, 254, 258, 314, 327  
*Conservatism as Weltanschauung* 247, 258  
 Offenbach 134  
 Oldenburg-Januschau, Elard von 445, 553, 582  
 Online Supplement (<http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>)  
 xi, xii, xix, xxi, xxiv, 2, 13, 21, 49, 54, 75, 83, 102, 107, 111, 125, 128, 134, 145, 154, 165, 188, 233, 234, 241, 259, 264, 268, 283, 309, 313, 329, 330, 338, 427, 442, 457, 468, 475, 478, 490, 492, 506, 507, 508, 510, 514, 515, 525, 571, 576, 635, 639  
 Opitz, Hugo *Gottfried* 349, 353, 356, 437, 473, 539–40  
 Oppen, Rudolf von 562  
 Ortega y Gasset, José 359, 371  
 Otto, Viktor von 409  
  
 Pachnicke, Hermann 559, 566  
 Pan-German League 10, 127, 250, 258, 320–1, 339, 341, 412, 417, 419, 421–2, 426, 429–31, 438, 454, 537, 558, 568, 571, 586–90, 598, 608–9, 628  
 Paraguay 219  
 Paris 35, 95, 98, 100, 272  
 Paris Commune (1871) 10, 95–6, 100, 102, 124, 286, 340  
 parliamentarism 4, 6, 11, 25, 43, 46, 61, 90, 96, 178–82, 298, 317, 354, 386, 546, 579, 611, 619, 623  
 Paul, Georg 2  
 Payer, Friedrich von 578  
 Peace Treaty, Prussia and Saxony (1866) 27, 29, 36  
 Penzig, August 539  
 Perrot, Franz 204–5, 224  
 Peter, Grand Duke of Oldenburg 125  
 Petermann, Theodor 378  
*Peuple, Le* 363  
 Pfeiffer, Ernst Gustav *Julius* 172  
 Pflanze, Otto 114  
 Pflug, Philipp 512–14  
 Pflugk, Walter von 416  
 Philipp, Kurt 608  
 Philipp, Gustav 289  
 Philipsborn, Max von 300  
 Pieschen 168, 277  
 Pilsen 272  
 Pinkert, Alexander 205, 210–12, 215–16, 220, 223–4  
*Appeal to the German Nation* 210  
*On the Jewish Question* 210  
 Pirna 21, 169  
 Plagwitz 168  
 Planitz, Paul Edler von der 315  
 Plauen 21, 31, 234, 432, 438, 477, 519, 523, 571, 591  
 Poensgen, Carl *Oskar* 368  
 Polenz 169  
 Poles 157, 365, 572  
*Politische Bilderbogen* 245–6  
 Prague 272, 394  
 press 86, 92, *see also* antisemites and antisemitism: publicists  
 antisemitic 244, 321  
 Catholic 592  
 conservative 167, 207, 302, 323, 592  
 Jewish 216, 224  
 liberal 137, 203, 300, 346  
 SPD 106, 109, 124, 134, 308, 395, 490–1, 590  
 Press Law, Saxon (1870) 86  
 Press Law, Reich (1874) 86, 124  
*Preussische Jahrbücher* 34, 70, 210, 259, 302, 346, 405  
 Progressive People's Party 546, 551, 553, 554, 556, 559, 560, 561, 562, 565, 566, 569–73, 575–6, 578, 581, 583, 598–600, 602–3, 605, 611, 613

- progressives, *see* German Progressive Party;  
     liberals, left, and left liberalism; Progressive  
     People's Party; Radical People's Party;  
     Radical Union
- Protestant clergy 55, 75, 158, 277, 344  
 Protestant League 412, 418  
 Protestantism and Protestant Church 14,  
     15, 23, 24, 121, 127, 184, 197, 199,  
     201–6, 245–6, 271, 296, 321, 341, 426,  
     429, 624
- Prussia 5, 13, 15, 20, 21, 24, 28, 30, 33–6,  
     39, 44, 51, 60, 62, 65, 75, 78, 83, 89–90,  
     91, 98, 103, 111–12, 115, 120, 122, 131,  
     137–8, 141–2, 148, 160, 170–1, 179, 190,  
     202, 205, 207, 214, 225, 238, 267, 271,  
     275, 278–80, 291, 302–3, 360, 367–72,  
     393, 402, 410–11, 444–5, 484, 486,  
     515–16, 533, 546–7, 555, 557, 578,  
     580–1, 593–4, 602, 626–7, *see also*  
     Landtag (Prussian)  
     army 27, 62, 114, 243, 248  
     occupation of Saxony (1866) 26–7, 31, 51,  
     62, 98, 594
- Prussian Association Law 220, 273  
 Prussian Criminal Code 277  
 Prussian League 598  
 Prussian People's Association 30, 204  
     *Kalender* 204
- Pudor, Heinrich 247, 599  
 Putbus Dictations 43  
 Puttkamer, Robert von 141–3, 151, 164, 175,  
     178, 180  
 Puttrich, Ludwig 149–50
- Querfurth, Hans von 441
- Radical People's Party 260, 261, 263, 285, 312,  
     328, 352, 386, 418, 431, 438, 484, 495,  
     499, 500–5, 510–15, 523, 526–7, 532,  
     535, 540, 542–5, *see also* German Radical  
     Party; liberals, left, and left liberalism
- Radical Union 261
- Rathenau, Walther 10
- Rauchhaupt, Friedrich Wilhelm von 367, 391  
*Red Spectre of Social Democracy in Germany, The,*  
*or: Those Without a Fatherland. The*  
*Machinations of Bebel and Comrades* 101
- Reform Association, *see* German Reform  
     Association
- Reich Association (Dresden), *see* German Reich  
     Association (Dresden)
- Reich Association Law (1908) 491, 562,  
     568, 584
- Reich chancellery 114–15, 181, 215, 247, 258,  
     381, 408, 413, 416, 417, 444, 485, 551,  
     553, 555, 573, 585, 601
- Reich Constitution 179, 274, 315  
 Reich Criminal Code 104, 107, 115, 131, 185,  
     211–12, 239, 271, 279
- Reichenbach 240  
*Reichsbote, Der* 205, 280
- Reichstag, German 67, 75, 97–9, 102, 104,  
     106, 112, 118, 123–4, 127–30, 131–4,  
     137, 143–4, 153, 157–8, 171–5, 179–81,  
     185, 191, 193, 196, 205, 209, 211, 213,  
     225, 231–3, 235, 237, 239, 250, 257,  
     264–6, 270, 271–8, 280–1, 291, 298–9,  
     314, 316, 321, 334–7, 368, 372–4, 413,  
     438, 525, 558, 579, 584, 597, 599–600,  
     *see also* suffrage: Reichstag  
     caucuses 101, 125, 133, 156, 182, 251, 255,  
     314, 329, 412, 415, 581–2  
     Constitutional Committee 599  
     Election Oversight Committee 171–7, 181,  
     376, 420  
     Peace Resolution (1917) 597, 599  
     voting law (1869) 67, 127, 157, 173–4, 178
- Reichstag, North German 3, 8, 37, 38, 39, 44,  
     48, 52–4, 57–8, 61–2, 64, 67, 73, 81, 86,  
     88–90, 94–6  
     caucuses 57, 61, 63–4
- Reichstag constituencies in Saxony 10, 48–9,  
     52, 102, 119, 124, 128, 135, 153, 171,  
     188, 233, 261, 319, 324, 327–9, 338, 378,  
     408, 423, 489, 492
- 1: Zittau 52, 101, 172, 263, 332, 489, 575  
 2: Löbau 54, 55, 110, 263, 332, 421, 489,  
     575  
 3: Bautzen 55, 124, 228, 261, 263, 327, 329,  
     332, 334, 489, 575, 599  
 4: Dresden-New City 54, 160, 170, 232,  
     240, 261, 263, 312, 329, 332, 423, 489,  
     575  
 5: Dresden-Old City 53, 54, 57, 124, 127,  
     137–8, 160–1, 164, 170, 175, 212, 220,  
     232, 263, 312, 329, 332, 354, 423, 426,  
     489, 556, 575  
 6: Dresden-County 54, 110, 160, 176, 232,  
     263, 330, 332, 489, 575  
 7: Meißen 52, 101, 181, 225, 263, 332,  
     421–2, 489, 575  
 8: Pirna 53, 263, 332, 421, 489, 575  
 9: Freiberg 52, 69, 263, 327, 332, 421–2,  
     489, 560, 570, 575  
 10: Döbeln 52, 138, 228, 327, 332, 421,  
     422, 426, 489, 575  
 11: Oschatz-Grimma 110, 331, 332, 334,  
     422, 489, 493, 570, 575, 598  
 12: Leipzig-City 53–4, 110, 188, 228, 263,  
     309, 326, 327–9, 332, 422, 489, 493, 498,  
     559, 575  
 13: Leipzig-County 52, 54, 113, 137, 228,  
     233, 237, 263, 309, 326, 328, 330, 332,  
     489–90, 493, 498, 575  
 14: Borna 101, 139, 333, 420–1, 426, 489,  
     493, 554, 575, 583  
 15: Mittweida 119, 333, 423, 489, 575–6  
 16: Chemnitz 64, 137, 232, 235, 331, 333,  
     423, 489, 575–6  
 17: Glauchau-Meerane 53, 56, 101,  
     110, 124, 175, 328, 333, 423, 489,  
     560, 575–6

Reichstag constituencies in Saxony (*cont.*)

- 18: Zwickau 53, 56, 101, 137, 228, 263, 324, 333, 423, 489, 575–6
  - 19: Stollberg 53, 56, 64, 94, 101, 110, 333–4, 423, 489, 560, 575–6
  - 20: Marienberg 20, 110, 333, 419, 423, 489, 575–6, 578
  - 21: Annaberg 333, 423, 426, 489, 564, 565, 575–6
  - 22: Auerbach 188, 333, 423, 489, 575–6
  - 23: Plauen 329, 333, 334, 423, 489, 565, 569–70, 575
- Reichstag elections 7, 48, 84, 107, 115, 135–6, 139–40, 151, 157, 170, 179–80, 186, 226, 232, 241, 284, 344, 416, 443, 478, 536
- 1867 29, 47–8, 53–8, 60, 63–5, 67, 90, 102
  - 1871 90, 97, 99–102, 106–7, 111–13, 464
  - 1874 106, 110–14, 117, 124, 126
  - 1877 115, 118, 125–6, 128, 130, 139, 172, 207
  - 1878 132–3, 136–40, 154, 209
  - 1881 136, 141–2, 152–3, 154, 160–6, 171, 173–5, 177, 180, 190, 212–13
  - 1884 136, 153, 155–6, 173–4, 177, 181, 187–8, 190, 191, 214, 220
  - 1887 57, 134–6, 153, 155–6, 167, 187–8, 191, 207, 225–6, 235, 267
  - 1890 135–6, 170, 184–5, 227, 230, 233, 235–7, 244, 264, 267, 307, 464
  - 1893 243, 246, 248, 250, 259, 263, 264, 267, 274–5, 307, 313, 464
  - 1898 306–7, 309–13, 325, 330, 346, 464
  - 1903 9, 306, 318–33, 335, 339–42, 343–6, 357, 373, 378, 380, 382–4, 402, 407, 409, 412–13, 419, 423, 427–8, 430, 433, 447, 464, 514, 576
  - 1907 173, 339, 358, 370, 393, 408, 412, 415, 417–18, 425, 427–31, 434, 444, 450, 464, 479, 492–3, 497, 497, 514, 537, 572, 574
  - 1912 173, 216, 412, 434, 464, 493, 514, 544, 550, 552, 556, 559–61, 565–72, 574–8, 580–1, 584–6, 591, 593, 622
- Reinhardt, August 27
- Reudnitz 168
- revolution of November 1918 29, 531
- revolutions of 1848–9 5, 20, 23, 24, 31, 32, 38, 81
- Rheinbaben, Georg von 549
- Rhineland 13, 169
- Richter, Eugen 191–2
- Riedel, Christian 52
- Riedel, Max 491
- Ritter, Gerhard A. 15, 528
- Robespierre, Maximilien 5
- Rochlitz 119
- Rodin, Auguste 383
- Roesler, Carl Friedrich *Hermann* 79

- Rokkan, Stein 15
  - Rosen, Kathinka von 591
  - On the Moral Weakness of Women* (1903) 591
  - Rosenhagen, Martin 261
  - Roßler, Constantin 281
  - Roßwein 220
  - Roth, Johann *Friedrich* 500–1, 604
  - Rüder, Christian 97–8
  - Ruge, Arnold 32
  - Rüger, Conrad (von) 314, 345, 347–8, 405, 408, 437, 453, 503, 531, 533–6, 542, 544–5, 623
  - Rühle, Otto 403
  - Ruhr region 516
  - Rumpelt, Alexis *Anselm* 254, 348–51, 357, 372–6, 382, 406, 422, 430–1, 433, 437, 453, 626
  - Ruppert, Karl 160
  - Rural Government Act (Saxony) 86
  - Russia 220, 243, 357, 360, 365–6, 433, 603
  - Russian Revolution (1905) 394–5, 397, 400–1, 628
  - Russo-Japanese War 357
- “Sachsen, Johann Nepomuck von” 32
- Sachße, Karl Friedrich *Raimund* 52, 69, 76
- Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* 282, 329, 349, 356, 397, 404
- Sächsische Dorfzeitung* 61
- Sächsische Zeitung* 50, 53, 55
- Sächsischer Volksfreund* 212, 224
- Sächsisches Wochenblatt* 170
- Saenger, Samuel 579
- Salza-Lichtenau, Hermann von 55
- Salzburg, Friedrich 201–3
- Savile, George, Lord Halifax 551
- Saxe-Coburg-Gotha 115, 580
- Saxe-Weimar 453
- Saxon Agricultural Council 352, 541
- Saxon Agricultural Credit Association 206, 222–3, 315, 345, 374, 442, 621
- Saxon army 29, 62, 114, 142, 167
- Saxon Association Law (“Saxon Jewel”) 98, 159, 173, 220, 238–9, 242, 268, 273, 282, 290, 307–8, 596
- Saxon Automobile Club 417, 564
- Saxon Constitution (1831) 25
- Saxon Criminal Code 104, 173, 273, 277
- Saxon Domicile Law 173
- Saxon Electoral Committee 52
- Saxon *Mittelstand* Union 420–1, 473, 495, 505
- Saxon People’s Party 36–7, 38, 52, 55, 58, 83, 93, 594
- Saxon police 104, 307
- Saxon Progressive Association 32
- Saxon Progressive Party, *see* German Progressive Party
- Saxon Royal Statistical Office 396, 437, 456, 462, 468, 477, 512, 521, 525, 606, 621

- Schäffle, Albert 296, 383, 446, 463  
 Schaffrath, Wilhelm Michael 87, 138  
 Schanz, Oskar 604  
 Scheidemann, Philipp 551  
 Schiffer, Eugen 369, 551–2, 557, 567, 586  
 Schill, Otto 349, 355  
 Schippel, Max 235, 239  
 Schlieben, Joachim von 409  
 Schmeitzner, Ernst 215–17  
     *Schmeitzner's Internationale*  
     *Monatsschrift* 215–16  
 Schmidt, Oswin 497–8, 604  
 Schnabel, Alban 604  
 Schoenlank, Bruno 308  
 Schoenberg, Arnold 411–12  
     *String Quartet No. 1* 411–12  
 Schönberg family, von 249, 315  
 Schönborg-Glauchau, Joachim von 608  
 Schönefeld 168  
 Schönheiderhammer 442  
 School Bill (Saxony) 87, 105, 582, 610  
 Schraps, Reinhold 52, 58, 62, 63, 101–2  
 Schreck, Hermann 53  
 Schröder, Max *Otto* 611  
 Schücking, Lothar 579  
 Schulz, Andreas 277  
 Schwager, Ernst 510, 512–14  
 Schwanenflügel, Wilhelm Aemilus von 22  
 Schwarze, Friedrich von 160  
 Schweitzer, Johann Baptiste 37  
 Schwerin-Löwitz, Hans von 555, 573  
 Scotland 5  
 Second Moroccan Crisis (1911) 554, 558, 566, 581  
 Second World War 627  
 Sedan, Battle of (1870) 95, 97  
 Seven Years' War 88  
 Seydewitz, Ernst von 610–11  
 Seyfert, Hermann *Richard* 604  
 Shakespeare, William 135, 436  
 Shklar, Judith 47, 616  
 Siegfried, Richard 375–6, 383  
 Silesia 13, 169  
*Simplicissimus* 281, 397, 414, 507, 546, 550, 563, 622  
 Sindermann, Karl 577  
 Singer, Paul 173, 237, 245  
 Slesina, Gustav 564–5  
 Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Social Democrats 1, 7, 8–12, 13, 15, 37–8, 53, 55, 56, 65, 66, 68, 70, 73, 76, 82, 86, 92–102, 104–15, 120–5, 128–30, 131–67, 172–8, 181–6, 189–93, 196–8, 207–10, 212, 225–6, 228–9, 230, 232–9, 241–2, 245, 248, 252–4, 258, 260, 262–8, 270–5, 277–8, 280–5, 287–90, 292–303, 305–13, 316, 318–20, 322–48, 351–8, 361, 365, 369–74, 377–85, 387–91, 393–406, 407–9, 411–12, 415–16, 418–22, 424–33, 435, 437–43, 448–9, 452–62, 466–74, 479–81, 483–93, 496–507, 510–15, 517, 519, 521–35, 537–46, 549–52, 557, 560–3, 565–78, 580–1, 583, 585, 587–90, 592, 594, 596–600, 602–3, 606, 608, 611, 618, 621–7, *see also* Independent Social Democratic Party; Majority Social Democratic Party  
 Braunschweig committee 97–9, 101  
 Bremen congress (1904) 338  
 Copenhagen congress (1883) 168  
 Dresden congress (1903) 335, 337–9  
 Eisenach congress (1869) 93  
 Eisenachers 93, 97, 106, 109, 113  
 Erfurt congress (1891) 93  
 fellow travelers 8, 228, 238, 323, 334, 342, 429, 459, 469, 483, 521, 554  
 Gotha congress (1875) 93  
 Gymnastic Society 286  
 Jena congress (1905) 357  
 Jena congress (1911) 571  
*Liebe Schwester* 564  
 Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) 93  
 Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD) 93–4  
     women 93, 124, 161, 162, 277, 286, 292, 324, 326, 372, 387, 396, 400, 403, 491–2, 561, 564, 567, 568, 591, 595  
     “Women's Bureau” (Berlin) 568  
 social reform 156, 204, 221, 227, 229, 235, 272, 302, 339  
 socialism and socialists 8–10, 13, 34, 36–7, 51–2, 58, 92–3, 95, 107, 109, 111–14, 120–1, 125, 127–8, 131–3, 135–8, 142, 150, 156, 158–60, 164–8, 170–1, 174, 182–3, 186–9, 191–2, 229, 230, 236, 253, 255, 263, 270, 317, 337, 354–6, 363, 368, 387, 390, 403, 594, 624–5, *see also* Marxism and Marxists; Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Social Democrats  
     First International 93–4  
     Second International 9, 354, 363  
 Society for the Eradication of the Jews (United States) 224  
 Solms-Sonnenwalde, Eberhard zu 89, 121, 129  
*Sonderweg* thesis 10–11, 618–19  
*Sozialdemokrat, Der* 141, 152, 157, 162–3  
*Sozialistische Monatshefte* 354, 579  
 Spain 296  
 Spartacus League 594  
 Spieß, Hans 510  
 Spitzemberg, Hildegard von 585  
 Spremberg 134  
 St. Petersburg 102, 394  
*Staatsrat* (Saxon) 611–12  
 Stampfer, Friedrich 573  
 Starke, Curt 190  
 Stelzer, Oswald 168

- Stephani, Martin *Eduard* 32, 34, 55, 116, 133  
 Stephen, Condie 320  
 Stettin 134, 227  
 Stöcker, Adolf 203, 207, 209–10, 212, 215, 218, 243–4, 248, 253, 256, 365  
 Stötteritz 168  
 Stollberg-Wernigerode, Udo zu 339–41  
 Stollberg 523  
 Stolle, Karl *Wilhelm* 149  
 Stoppard, Tom 1, 621  
 Strachey, George 89, 110, 120, 123, 129, 143–4, 148, 156, 182, 211, 221, 230, 236, 238–9, 262, 281, 623  
 Straumer, Friedrich 208  
 Streit, Lothar 53, 289  
 Stresemann, Gustav 346, 350, 355–6, 405, 422, 426, 438, 542, 557–8, 564–5, 583, 597  
 Strödel, Bernhard 117, 225–6  
 Stolpen 301  
 Stübel, Paul Alfred 1–2, 138, 166, 220  
 Stumm-Halberg, Carl Ferdinand (von) 272  
 Stuttgart 166  
 suffrage and suffrage reform  
   Austria 363–6  
   Baden 81, 367  
   Bavaria 349, 367, 372  
   Belgium 353, 363–4  
   Braunschweig 367  
   Chemnitz 387–9  
   demonstrations (1905) 242, 374, 393–405, 408–9, 439, 457, 459, 538  
   demonstrations (1908) 457–9  
   Dresden 387–9  
   France 81, 363  
   Frankfurt Parliament (1848–49) 45, 81, 85  
   Great Britain 361–2  
   Hamburg 367  
   hybrid systems 77, 351–7, 363, 372, 375, 384, 389, 391, 439, 443, 446, 449, 456  
   Landtag (Prussian) 7, 14, 40–3, 284, 287–90, 292, 297, 300–1, 368–72, 375, 401, 409–10, 444–5, 455, 459, 535, 538, 545, 547–50, 558, 579, 581–2, 584–6, 589, 593, 597, 605–6, 620  
   Landtag (Saxon) 14, 32, 45–6, 47, 66–9, 73, 78, 107, 241, 268, 284, 289, 292–8, 303, 316, 318, 325, 334, 340, 343–58, 360, 374–82, 386, 390, 395, 400–2, 405–6, 415, 419, 429, 431, 433, 439, 448, 460, 480, 506, 545, 597, 600–2, 612–13, 620  
   Landtag (Saxon), law of 1868 409, 461–2, 478, 525, 594  
   Landtag (Saxon), law of 1896 410, 453, 461–3, 465, 475, 478, 588, 594, 621  
   Landtag (Saxon), law of 1909 435, 441, 445, 462–3, 465–6, 475–6, 478–80, 483, 515, 519, 525, 534, 537, 541–2, 577, 582, 584, 588, 593–4, 596, 603, 615  
   Landtag (Saxon), reform of 1868, discussion of 14, 66–80, 90, 109, 192–3, 196, 301, 620  
   Landtag (Saxon), reform of 1896, discussion of 14, 193, 283–5, 288–9, 297–306, 310–11, 325, 335, 343–4, 351, 354, 357, 373, 376, 386, 620  
   Landtag (Saxon), reform of 1909, discussion of 14, 193, 352, 367, 369–73, 381, 383, 390, 432, 435–6, 440, 445, 447–51, 455–6, 458–9, 463, 474, 487, 620, 623  
   Leipzig 284, 286–91, 309, 387, 388–9  
   Lübeck 367  
   Mecklenburg 367  
   municipal 73, 168–70, 291, 386, 387–8  
   proportional representation 180–1, 288, 296, 334, 351, 364, 368, 372, 375–8, 382–5, 396, 444–9, 454, 467, 541, 547, 587, 602, 606–7, 610–12, 622–4  
   reform plan, Saxon (1907) 406–8  
   Reichstag 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 20, 38, 40–6, 55, 66–9, 73, 76, 78, 81, 90, 96, 110, 117, 123, 125–8, 158, 178, 180–2, 208–9, 246, 251, 253–7, 270–5, 280, 285, 291, 301, 309, 311, 316, 320–1, 334, 337–9, 346, 369, 380, 478, 480, 566, 587, 590, 606, 623  
   Thuringian states 367  
   United States 361–3  
   universal manhood, *see* suffrage: Reichstag  
   women 361–2, 364, 373, 376, 391, 463, 491, 537, 564, 567–8, 591  
   Württemberg 81, 367  
 Suffrage League 301, 343  
 Suval, Stanley 618  
 Sweden 79, 224, 360, 375, 607  
 Switzerland 89, 138, 162, 335, 407, 607  
 Tacitus 131  
*Tägliche Rundschau* 403  
 Thielau, Heinrich von 54  
 Thöny, Eduard 414  
 Thuringian states 579  
*Times* (London) 264, 398  
 Tocqueville, Alexis de 519, 536  
   *L'Ancien régime et la révolution en France* (1856) 519  
 Tokyo 79  
 Tomansky, Michael 157  
 trade unions 94–5, 97, 115, 134–5, 139, 158, 308, 310, 324, 401, 424, 474, 491–2, 595  
 Treitschke, Heinrich von 33–6, 44, 70, 210, 212, 592  
   *The Future of the North-German Middle States* (1866) 34, 36  
   *Socialism and its Patrons* (1874) 116  
 Tröndlin, Carl 188  
 Trützschler family 315

- Turati, Filippo 354  
 Twain, Mark (Samuel Clemens) 614–15  
     *A Tramp Abroad* 615  
     *The Curious Republic of Gondour* 614–15  
     *Twentieth Century, The* 245–6  
 Twisten, Karl 43
- Uhlig, Karl Otto 599, 604, 613  
 Uhlmann, Karl 289  
 Ulrich, Karl Eduard 253, 256, 258, 438  
     *State-Supporting Demagogy and*  
     *State-Endangering Pussy-Footing* 258  
 Ungern-Sternberg, Eduard von 117, 247  
     *The Jewish Question* (1892) 247  
 Union of German Workers' Associations 37–8  
 United States 160, 272, 335, 359–62, 376, 564,  
     576, 617, 624  
 Unold, Johannes 587  
 Upper Lusatia 203  
 urbanization 13, 334  
 urban-rural divide 21, 22, 56, 72, 74, 75, 77,  
     78, 79, 91, 110, 148, 186, 193, 197, 203,  
     268, 283, 300, 314, 316, 329, 330, 331,  
     334, 347, 350, 351, 368–9, 384, 385, 409,  
     442, 443, 446, 448, 456, 465, 466, 475,  
     477, 507, 509, 510, 521, 524, 526–7, 528,  
     531, 580, 603, 619
- Vahlteich, Julius 52, 150, 158–60  
 van de Velde, Henry 451  
 Vandervelde, Emile 364  
*Vaterland, Das* 198, 225, 237, 249–50, 252,  
     255, 260–1, 268, 295, 301, 323, 341,  
     343, 495  
 Verdy du Vernois, Julius von 339  
 veterans' associations 158, 166–7, 258, 416,  
     *see also* League of Saxon Veterans'  
     Associations  
 Victoria, Queen of England 48  
 Vienna 35, 100, 330, 357, 360, 364–6, 394,  
     396, 411, 429, 453  
 Virchow, Rudolf 190, 245  
 Vitzthum von Eckstädt, Christoph 486–7,  
     496–9, 501–5, 531–5, 537–8, 542–6, 548,  
     552, 557, 565, 568–71, 595–6, 600–3,  
     605–7, 609–11, 623  
 Vitzthum von Eckstädt, Otto Friedrich 399,  
     405, 413, 426, 482, 612  
*völkisch* movement 216, 245, 247, 252  
 Vogel, Paul 438, 450, 540, 542, 608, 612  
*Volksstaat, Der* 98–9, 104, 109  
*Volksstimme* 491  
*Volkszeitung* 218  
 Vollmar, Georg von 149, 197–8, 308, 335, 337  
*Vorwärts* 124, 140, 242, 329, 354, 459, 566, 568  
*Vossische Zeitung* 403–4
- Wach, Adolf 440, 612  
 Wächter, Carl (von) 55–6
- Wähler, Der 124, 286  
 Wäntig, Paul 612  
 Wagener, Hermann 30, 41, 100, 204  
 Wagner, Eduard 560  
 Wagner, Richard 247, 411  
     "Judaism in Music" 247  
 Wahnschaffe, Arnold 551, 573  
 Waldegge, Egon (pseud.), *see* Alexander Pinkert  
 Waldersee, Alfred von 273, 339  
 Wallot, Paul 439, 540  
 Walter, Georg Ludwig August 138  
 Wartenburg, Heinrich Yorck von 582  
 Watzdorf, Werner von 314–16  
 Weathermen 250  
 Weber, Max 6, 579  
 Weber, Eugen 89  
 Weimar 166  
 Weimar Republic 10, 12, 534, 551, 616,  
     618, 627  
 Welck, Johann Georg von 119, 404  
 Werner, Ludwig 226  
 Westarp, Kuno von 598  
 Westphalia 243  
 Wettin dynasty (Saxony) 14, 24, 35, 89, 262  
 Wettstein-Adelt, Minna (1893) 568  
     *Three and a Half Months as a Factory Worker*  
     (1893) 568  
 Wiechel, Hugo 378–80  
 Wiemer, Otto 573  
 Wiemer, Philipp 158  
 Wigard, Franz 53  
 Wildgrube, Max 598–9, 608  
 Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Prussia 585  
 Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, German Kaiser 89,  
     100, 103, 115–16, 127, 129, 131, 166–8,  
     180, 208, 483  
 Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, German Kaiser  
     178, 225, 231, 234, 239, 242–3, 256, 261,  
     270–5, 278–82, 284, 291, 302, 310, 319,  
     335, 337–9, 341, 372, 399–400, 407, 413,  
     427–8, 434, 440, 453–4, 485, 501, 546,  
     548–9, 572, 580, 585–7, 593, 597, 602,  
     605, 609  
 Wilhelm II, King of Württemberg 279  
 Wilhelm Ernst, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-  
     Eisenach 580  
 Wilmanns, Carl 204, 224  
     *The "Golden" International and the Necessity of*  
     *a Social Reform Party* 204  
 Wilsdorf, Victor von 611  
 Winkler, Johann Max 604  
 Witzleben, Cäsar Dietrich von 50, 150  
 Wolcott, James 152, 616  
 Wolf, Heinrich 587  
 Women's Day demonstrations 404  
 women's movement 586, *see also* Social  
     Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and  
     Social Democrats: women; suffrage and  
     suffrage reform: women



- Workers' Education Societies 32, 37  
     Leipzig 37  
 Württemberg 6, 13, 23, 88–9, 182, 202, 280,  
     360, 375, 381, 528, 579–80  
 Würzburger, Eugen 437, 467–72, 477, 521,  
     522–3  
 Wurmb, Günther Karl *Lothar* von 35–6, 48,  
     57, 98  
 Wurzen 401, 561  
  
 Xanten ritual murder trial (1892) 246  
  
 Zabern Affair 579  
 Zschendorf 169  
 Zehman family, von 249  
 Zehman, Ludwig von 52, 67, 70–1, 101, 120  
  
 Zetkin, Clara 308, 354  
 Zietz, Luise 568  
     *Women and the Political Struggle* (1911) 568  
 Zimmermann, Oswald 227, 244, 248–9,  
     260–1, 301, 310, 327–8, 419  
 Zittau 31, 39, 101, 189, 483, 500–1, 510,  
     512–15, 561  
*Zittauer Morgenzeitung* 191, 343, 352, 500,  
     510, 561  
*Zittauer Nachrichten* 561  
 Zoepfel, Karl *Georg* 440, 604  
*Zukunft, Die* 579  
 Zurich 162  
 Zwickau 21, 22, 117–18, 150–1, 164,  
     189, 226–7, 231, 289, 427, 438,  
     523, 564